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QUEEN HORTENSE
AND HER FRIENDS

Vol. I



Hortense de Beauharnais.

QUEEN HORTENSE AND HER FRIENDS

1783—1837

By I. A. TAYLOR

Author of "A Life of Lord Edward Fitzgerald,"
"Queen Henrietta Maria," etc., etc.

WITH TWENTY-FOUR FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS
AND TWO PHOTOGRAVURE PLATES

IN TWO VOLUMES

Vol. I

London: HUTCHINSON & CO.
Paternoster Row   1907

PREFATORY NOTE

IN these volumes I have attempted to paint, upon the shifting background of her times, a picture of Hortense de Beauharnais, Queen of Holland and Duchesse de Saint-Leu, which should be neither the work of a partisan nor of an enemy, neither unduly favourable nor unnecessarily harsh. The judgments formed upon the *artiste-reine* at times when political feeling ran high have been not unnaturally coloured by prejudice and passion. "Some," says M. Nauroy, "have made a goddess of her, others have not been able to forgive her Napoleon III." The daughter of Joséphine, and still more the mother of the Emperor, could scarcely expect an unbiassed verdict, and if the voice of the flatterer was not dumb in days when the Beauharnais cult was dominant, the animosities of party hatred have not failed to make the balance even. There are those, indeed, who would grudge her so much as the claim to compassion supplied by her sorrows. "She has been much pitied for her misfortunes," says her envenomed assailant,

M. Turquan. "It has been forgotten that it was in her power to avoid them almost all, and that she owed the greater number to herself. Moreover, the sorrows of Princes, and above all, of Princesses, are often very trifling."

The same might be said of a proportion, at least, of the sorrows of most men and women ; but it will be for the reader to determine whether amongst "*bien petits malheurs*" should be classed Hortense's most unhappy marriage, forced upon her at eighteen ; the deaths of two out of her three sons ; that of her only brother, the object of her passionate affection, in the prime of life ; the repudiation of the mother she loved ; and the downfall of the Empire with all it represented to her, accompanied by lifelong exile and separation from home and friends.

It has been no part of my purpose to exonerate her from blame. But if she sinned, she suffered for it ; and for the faults she committed the reckoning was heavy.

Hortense has not been permitted to make her defence to the public. Her confessions, perhaps her justifications, remain as she left them, unprinted, and it is upon the data supplied by contemporaries that posterity must form its conclusions. Of one episode only her own account has been published, and a passage in the introduction to the volume containing

her narrative of the year 1831 might, it is easy to imagine, have prefaced a more inclusive history of her life. "Now that I have allowed myself," she wrote, "to be persuaded of the necessity of rendering the world a judge of what I have done, as well as of what I have felt, I shall not repent of it if those who read what I have written, identifying themselves with my sorrows, accord me those sentiments of interest and affection I have always desired from my countrymen."

I. A. T.

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Queen Hortense and her Friends

CHAPTER I

1783—1795

The Beauharnais and Tascher families—Marriage of Alexandre de Beauharnais and Joséphine—Domestic unhappiness—Hortense's birth—Separation of her parents—Childhood—In Martinique, and in France—The Terror—Joséphine and her husband in prison—Execution of Alexandre de Beauharnais.

IT was on April 10, 1783, and in the rue de la Pépinière, Paris, that Hortense Eugénie de Beauharnais, the future wife of Louis Bonaparte, Queen of Holland and mother of Napoleon III., was born.

There was at the moment nothing to warrant the anticipation of a brilliant destiny for either mother or child. Scarcely more than three years had passed since a marriage had taken place between Alexandre, younger son of the Marquis de Beauharnais, and Joséphine, daughter of Gaspard Joseph Tascher de la Pagerie, of the island of Martinique. But less than that space of time had sufficed to prove that the union was unlikely to be happy. Alexandre, not destitute of certain social gifts and attractions, was already, at nineteen, thoroughly disqualified by habits and

disposition from playing the part of husband thus early thrust upon him; nor had he found anything in his creole wife to reconcile him to the loss of his liberty. The arrangement had been made with little reference to the happiness of the two chiefly concerned. The Beauharnais and Tascher families, both originally belonging to the lesser Orléanais noblesse, had formed a close friendship during the tenure by the Marquis de Beauharnais of the office of Gouverneur des Îles du Vent de l'Amérique; and no objection had been raised on either side when Madame Renaudin (*née* Tascher), a lady occupying an equivocal position in the Marquis's household and afterwards his second wife, suggested a marriage between her brother's daughter and the young Vicomte de Beauharnais. Alexandre appears to have been acquiescent, and Joséphine was accordingly brought by her father to France, to be handed over to his keeping. The results were such as might have been anticipated. It does not seem that the bride, at sixteen, gave any promise of the charm she was afterwards to develop, and in Alexandre's eyes she was probably both provincial and plain; whilst the want of education natural in a child brought up in a tropical colony and belonging to a family of narrow means still further discredited her in the estimation of a lad who combined with love of pleasure and amusement an incongruous pedanticism and a value for culture and intellectual training. If, according to his own account, he had at first entertained the design of beginning his wife's education afresh and thus

repairing the waste of her fifteen years of life, he quickly abandoned the project ; and though continuing to enjoin by letter upon the indolent West Indian the duty of self-education and to extol the purity of intellectual enjoyments, he relinquished the intention of lending his personal supervision to her studies and left her thenceforth as much as possible to herself.

Such had been Joséphine's position during the years preceding her daughter's birth. With a husband whose indifference was fast deepening into aversion, with an aunt wholly disqualified from opening to her the doors of the Parisian society of which she had doubtless dreamed, there can have been little in her surroundings to compensate for the loss of home and kin, and the lonely child must often have looked back with regret to the lazy ease and idle enjoyment—the existence with “*point d'argent mais pas de besoins*”—of her island home.

The birth of her son, the future Prince Eugène, some two years older than his sister, might have been expected to work a change for the better in her relations with her husband ; but his interest in the child was not sufficient to keep him in Europe, and at the time that Hortense was born he had crossed the Atlantic and repaired to Martinique, where an English invasion was anticipated and military distinction might be hoped for.

He was still in the West Indies when the news that he had a second child reached him, finding him in no mood to give it a welcome. His visit to Martinique

and consequent intercourse with his wife's family had not been productive of good results ; and he had likewise fallen under the influence of a creole who had done her best, by retailing any available local gossip concerning Joséphine's past, to widen the breach already existing between husband and wife and to pave the way to ultimate separation. His reply to the letters informing him of the birth of his daughter was not only filled with unmeasured abuse, but contained the declaration of his determination to break off for the future all relations with her mother.

Save in so far as they may affect her daughter, it will be no part of the present work to enter into the question of the degree to which the charges brought against Joséphine at the various stages of her career may have been founded on fact. Of the greater part of Beauharnais's present accusations a refutation is furnished by the ample apologies made by him some fifteen months later for letters avowedly written under the influence of passion. That the disclaimer of paternity they had contained with regard to the newborn child was absolutely unjustified there has never been a doubt, nor did he persist in it. But although his tone underwent a marked change so soon as his wrath had had time to cool, he remained fixed in the determination he had announced to separate from his wife ; and by November, 1783, Joséphine had so far abandoned the hope she had at first indulged of inducing him to reconsider his decision, that she

had retired into the convent of Pantlemont and had lodged a legal complaint against her husband.

The ensuing proceedings resulted in a complete vindication of the injured wife ; and when she emerged from her retreat, in March, 1785, a separation had been formally arranged, ensuring to her a sufficient income, with the custody of her daughter ; whilst Eugène, remaining in her care till he had entered upon his sixth year, was after that date to be permitted to spend his summers with his mother.

Thus virtually ended the connection between Beauharnais and his wife. As time went on, the bitterness on the one side and the other so far diminished that a correspondence was kept up between the two on the subject of their children, and occasional meetings took place in the houses of common friends ; but it does not appear, in spite of assertions to the contrary, that steps were ever taken to cancel the deed of separation, or that its provisions did not remain in force to the end. To Hortense her father, even whilst alive, can have been scarcely more than a name.

Of the child's early years the little that can be known must be chiefly inferred from her mother's history. Placed out to nurse for close upon two years, it was not until Joséphine's residence at Pantlemont was concluded that she was removed from the care of the Mère Rousseau, at Chelles. In the meantime, Madame de Beauharnais had not been backward in profiting by the opportunities afforded her in the

convent of forming useful acquaintances, and of modelling her manners upon those of the women of the world accustomed, for one reason or another, to make it a place of temporary resort ; and it was at this time that her social education, afterwards carried to so high a point of perfection, was begun.

When, her position vindicated, she once more emerged from her retreat, it is probable that, with her children, she made, as before, a part of the household of the Marquis de Beauharnais, now settled at Fontainebleau. With Alexandre her relations remained on their newly established legal basis ; but a communication addressed to her father in May, 1787, indicates that the Vicomte had so far remembered his daughter's existence as to take some thought for her physical welfare. Her letter, she said, would not be long, as she was engaged in taking charge of little Hortense, who, by the desire of M. de Beauharnais, had been inoculated. "I thought it well," she added, "under the circumstances, not to oppose his request. So far I have only had to congratulate myself, the child being as well as could be wished. She is my consolation, charming alike in countenance and in character. She often speaks of her *grandpapa* and of her *grand'maman* la Pagerie, nor does she forget her aunt Manette, asking me, '*Maman*, shall I see them soon ?' "

Though a meeting, as it proved, was not far distant, at the moment it seemed unlikely. Her domestic troubles notwithstanding, Madame de Beauharnais was

by this time in a position contrasting favourably with that she had occupied before her daughter's birth. She was one-and-twenty, and, though of small intellectual capacity, was possessed of no little tact and social aptitude. Aided by her developing beauty and charm, and by the help of the friendships and acquaintanceships formed at Pantlemont, she had been gradually establishing her claim to the privileges due to her rank, and making good her foothold in that world to which her husband had shown so little inclination to introduce her. Of the three years thus spent information is scanty ; but it might be imagined that she would have had no inclination to exchange her French surroundings for the West Indian island she had quitted when scarcely emerged from childhood. It is, however, certain that in the summer of 1788, when Hortense was five years old, her mother left Fontainebleau abruptly, made a hurried journey to Havre, and, with her child, embarked in haste upon a small merchant vessel bound for Martinique.

The reasons deciding her upon what bore some resemblance to a flight must have been urgent, but they remain altogether undetermined ; nor does the family affection to which it has been in some quarters attributed appear an adequate motive. In her former home there was nothing to attract a woman of Joséphine's nature and disposition, in the first flush of her youth. Her father and sister were invalids ; money was scarce ; nor could she anticipate in the West Indies the enjoyment of the pleasures she had

tasted in France. Whatever had been the motive of her conduct, the years spent in Martinique must have been regarded by her in the light of a grievous squandering of the opportunities and possibilities of life.

For Hortense it was a different matter. To a child of six or seven a tropical island was full of charm. The beauty of the place, its luxuriant vegetation, its reaches of sea and land, made an impression never afterwards effaced upon an imagination unusually alive to such influences, and it has been suggested that to these early years may have been due the love of nature, of flowers and gardens, she afterwards displayed.

At seven years old the scene was once more changed. When, after a residence of a couple of years in her native island, actual danger was added to the melancholy routine of life, Joséphine gladly embraced the first opportunity of escape, and her daughter's experience of the West Indies was concluded. Catching the infection of the revolution in progress at home, Martinique had become the scene of a struggle between rival races and colours; anarchy and violence were prevailing; and when Durand de Braye, commanding the naval division and acquainted with the Beauharnais family, volunteered to receive the Vicomtesse and her child on board his vessel, Joséphine eagerly closed with the offer. Without so much as delaying to collect the necessary clothing for the voyage, she embarked; the ship set sail under fire from the forts; and by the middle of November, 1790, she was again in Paris.

The two years covered by the absence of the wife and daughter of Alexandre de Beauharnais had been eventful ones both to himself and to France. Into the details of his career, before and after this date, as deputy, as President of the Assembly—in which character he took a prominent part in the proceedings consequent upon the flight of the royal family—as revolutionary leader, and as general, it is not necessary to enter. But it must be remembered that the position he had achieved had a distinct bearing upon that of the woman who bore his name, and opened to her many doors which would otherwise have remained shut. By the time she returned to France, Alexandre had become so influential a member of the Assembly that, at Fontainebleau, where she was once more settled with her children, her boy afterwards remembered being pointed out as he passed through the streets, with the words, “Voilà le Dauphin.”¹ The consequences of a connection with Beauharnais were soon to change their character; but for the present his wife had been invested with some degree of importance, and was enabled to count amongst her acquaintances personages of increasing weight and position. The little creole had begun to ascend the social ladder.

The separation effected between husband and wife does not appear to have proved a bar to their possession of friends in common; and amongst these was a brother and sister, the Prince de Salm-Kirbourg and

¹ *Mémoires du Prince Eugène*, t. i.

the Princesse de Hohenzollern. Though the two had hitherto thrown in their lot with the revolution, it was made clear by the course of events that, in the present state of public feeling, it was impossible even for those in sympathy with the republic to indulge in any sense of security, and the Prince had prudently decided upon a return to his principality. Under these circumstances, and the condition of Paris being what it was, Joséphine determined to avail herself of the opportunity of removing her children from what was fast becoming a scene of violence ; and the Prince and his sister, when they started on their journey, were accompanied by Eugène and Hortense, consigned to the Princess by their mother, with a view of dispatching them to England so soon as it should prove feasible.

Hortense, at nine years old, was not too young to feel the separation from a mother commanding throughout her life the strong affections of both son and daughter ; and to a letter of the child's, written after the parting, Joséphine replied by one Hortense afterwards printed. She and her little daughter, she assured her, would not remain long apart. With the spring either the Princess would return to France, or she herself would go to fetch home her child. " Ah, how clever you will be ! " she added with tender flattery, " and how much good the Princess will have to tell me of my little children ! " Hortense must love her guardian well, be grateful to her, and give proof of her gratitude. " I grieve much at being parted from you," ended the mother. " I

am not yet comforted. I love my dear little Hortense with all my heart. Kiss Eugène for me. Adieu, my child, my Hortense."

Mother and child were to be reunited sooner than had been anticipated by either. The Vicomte de Beauharnais, less solicitous as to his children's safety than his wife, and in no way disposed to incur the suspicion of the authorities by sending them out of the country, despatched a messenger forthwith to pursue the travellers; they were overtaken in Artois, and Eugène and Hortense were promptly removed from the hands of their temporary guardians, the boy being placed by his father at the Collège National of Strasbourg, whilst his sister remained as before in her mother's care.

Of Hortense's life during the next two or three years information is again scarce, but she may be assumed to have divided her time, like her mother, between Paris and Croissy, where the necessary civic certificate was obtained. At this place a creole friend, Madame de Lamothe-Hosten, was in the habit of passing the summer, and her neighbourhood had doubtless proved an attraction to Joséphine. Hither Eugène came to join his mother when the college at Strasbourg was closed, and here Hortense first made the acquaintance of the future Madame de Rémusat, then Claire de Vergennes, two or three years her senior, and afterwards to become her intimate and faithful friend.

"I still remember," wrote this lady of the summer

of 1793, "how the young Hortense came to visit me in my chamber, and, amusing herself by passing in review some little jewels that I possessed, would often tell me that all her ambition for the future would be satisfied were she to become the mistress of a like treasure." ¹

The aspiration betrayed her mother's daughter. At the present moment, however, there were matters more pressing, even in Joséphine's eyes, than the acquirement of personal adornments. In Paris events were hurrying on, soon to culminate in the Terror; and when winter recalled the small colony from Croissy to the capital, they found what comfort was possible in arranging frequent meetings, now at one house, now at another, where the affairs of the day could be discussed, and methods devised of disarming the ever-wakeful suspicion of the revolutionary government.

The children, at least, may be imagined to have been free from apprehension; nor were amusements wanting to them. At Madame de Lamothe-Hosten's house a miniature stage had been arranged, upon which her daughter Desirée, three years older than Hortense, Émilie de Beauharnais, afterwards Madame de Lavallette, and others joined in dramatic entertainments, and Hortense is said to have given proof of the theatrical talent she displayed in later years.

A connection of the Hosten family has left a picture of the child, as it remained impressed upon his memory—a graceful little figure, with great blue

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 138.

eyes, apt, when the countenance was in repose, to be shadowed with melancholy, a brilliant complexion, and hair of the *blond cendré* tint, afterwards one of her chief beauties, rising in soft ruffled curls round her face. If there was no actual beauty as yet, she was not without charm. Her voice was musical, and a bright animation, the natural gaiety of childhood, alternated with absence of mind and a tendency to reverie, belonging partly to personal nature and disposition, but partly perhaps due to her strain of creole blood.¹ Such was the child Hortense de Beauharnais. The description in some of its features might equally apply to the woman she became.

It was not only in Madame de Lamothe-Hosten's salon that Hortense was set to play a part. At a time when no amount of service rendered to the Republican cause could be counted upon to safeguard a man, the necessity of yielding ostentatious obedience to the laws and regulations constantly enacted was urgent. When, further, there existed the additional danger attaching to noble birth, the matter became yet more pressing, and Alexandre de Beauharnais must have been aware that his position had been rendered critical by recent events. His command of the Army of the Rhine had been attended with disaster ; his popularity was on the wane ; and he was fast falling into disrepute at headquarters. His brother, a consistent Royalist, had quitted the country, leaving to his family the odium of a connection

¹ See *Hortense de Beauharnais* (C. d'Arjuzon).

with an *émigré*. Under these circumstances it was desirable that Alexandre should take every opportunity of proclaiming his loyalty to the principles he had adopted; and in deference to the decree that the children of nobles should be instructed in a trade, Eugène was apprenticed to a carpenter,¹ whilst his sister was set to learn the craft of a dressmaker, her nurse, or *gouvernante*, Marie Lannoy, having, it has been suggested, enacted the part of her teacher.

Meantime the prisons were filling faster and faster, and the outlook was becoming daily more anxious. Madame François de Beauharnais, the wife of the *émigré*, was expiating her husband's flight in prison; and in the letter Joséphine addressed to Vadier on her sister-in-law's behalf there are indications that Alexandre was not safe from suspicion. His failure to relieve Mayence had roused general indignation; the steps by which he had hoped to propitiate the government had not been successful; and by March, 1794, the Committee of Public Safety had taken the decisive step of ordering his arrest. Less than a fortnight later, he was lodged at the Carmelites. Worse was to follow. Scarcely more than a month after the Vicomte's arrest, and whether or not owing to her efforts to obtain his release, Joséphine was also in confinement.

By a curious chance, the prison for which she had been destined being crowded, it was to the Carmelites, where Alexandre had been already placed, that his

¹ *Mémoires du Prince Eugène. Mémoires de Constant.*

wife was taken. The separated pair were once more under the same roof, and it is plain that upon this occasion the consciousness of a common misfortune and impending danger took precedence of the memory of past grievances. The question was no longer whether life together was desirable, but whether life itself—life on any terms and under any conditions—could be secured. All else, to natures such as those of the husband and wife, was of incomparably less importance. It remained to concert together measures serving to effect the deliverance of both.

If any man might have counted upon his antecedents to save him, Beauharnais could do so. In the papers he supplied to the authorities he was able to demonstrate to the full that he had from the first adhered consistently to the Republican cause, whilst he made what capital was possible out of the fatherhood that had sat so lightly upon him; demanding his freedom, in the memorial he addressed to those upon whose decision his fate depended, in order that he might increase the hatred of kings in the hearts of his children—a boy now learning the trade of a carpenter in Paris, and a girl educated by her mother in Republican principles.

It is doubtful whether the hatred of kings was the most prominent sentiment in the hearts of the future Viceroy of Italy and Queen of Holland—a forlorn couple, left alone in the terrible Paris of that summer, when the city was filling up the measure of its crimes, and was preparing the way to inevitable

reaction. Upon the dark background it supplies the helpless group stands out—Eugène in his workman's blouse, his sister no doubt apparelled to suit the part of the dressmaker's apprentice she had been drilled to play, and the woman Lannoy, in whose charge they had remained. By her they were conducted to visit their mother in her prison, an old and ugly dog of Joséphine's, Fortuné byname, forming a not unimportant fourth in the melancholy party, since by means of papers attached to his collar the prisoners were acquainted with the efforts in progress on their behalf. Letters were also written by husband and wife conjointly to their children, and a species of artificial family sentiment was developed, not, in spite of the intrinsic tragedy of the situation, devoid of an element of comedy, when the imprisoned father is found addressing paternal exhortations and admonitions to the little daughter he would scarcely have known by sight.

"So you share my regrets at not seeing you," he writes. "You love me, and I cannot embrace you. Think of me, my child ; think of your mother. Give cause for satisfaction to those who take care of you, and work well. By so doing, by giving us the assurance that your time is well spent, we shall gain still greater confidence in your regrets and your remembrance. Farewell, my dear ; your mother and I grieve at not seeing you. The hope of caressing you soon is our support, and the pleasure of speaking of it our consolation."

Thus wrote Alexandre de Beauharnais, in the un-

rehearsed character of the model parent. A letter from Joséphine, enclosed in the same cover, rings more true.

“It grieves me,” wrote the prisoner, “to be parted from you and from my dear Eugène. I think without ceasing of my dear children, whom I love and kiss with all my heart.—JOSÉPHINE.”

Friends outside the walls of the prison were meantime at work, the documents signed by Eugène and his sister and addressed to the Convention and the Committee of Public Safety being doubtless dictated by older heads. An aunt of Alexandre’s, Fanny de Beauharnais—of whom it was written that

Eglé, belle et poëte, a deux petits travers,
Elle fait son visage et ne fait pas ses vers—

was, in spite of the epigram, the friend of all the *beaux esprits* of her day,¹ and was ready to use her influence on behalf of her nephew and his wife. To her powers of composition was probably due the style of one of the petitions nominally enanating from their son and daughter.

“Innocent children”—thus it ran—“demand from you, representative citizens, the liberty of their tender mother—of their mother, who has incurred no reproach save that of having entered a class to which she has proved that she is a stranger, since she has ever surrounded herself with the best of patriots, with the most excellent of *montagnards*. . . . Representative citizens, you will not permit innocence, patriotism,

¹ Jung, *Bonaparte et son temps*, t. iii, p. 112.

and virtue to suffer oppression. Give back life to unhappy children—their age is not made for suffering.

“EUGÈNE BEAUHARNAIS, *aged 12 years.*”

“HORTENSE BEAUHARNAIS, *aged 11 years.*”

In a second address to the Committee of Public Safety they demanded, somewhat rashly, that Joséphine's guiltlessness should be established by means of a speedy trial. Had their request been granted, it is probable that their mother's fate would have been sealed. Few prisoners emerged from the Tribunal acquitted. The petition happily produced no result, and Joséphine remained untried. Beauharnais proved less fortunate. By the end of July all uncertainty, so far as he was concerned, was over. Notwithstanding the gravity of the situation, it is again difficult to read the letter addressed by him at this juncture to his wife without a smile, when its tone is contrasted with the tenor of the relations formerly existing between the ill-matched couple. The machinations of his enemies, he told her, left him no hope of seeing her more, or of embracing his dear children. “I will not,” he proceeded, “speak to you of my regrets. My tender affection for them, the fraternal attachment binding me to you, can leave you in no doubt as to the sentiments with which, in this connection, I take leave of life. . . . Adieu, *mon amie* ; find consolation in my children, comfort them by the enlightening of their minds, and above all by teaching them that it is by means of virtue and of citizenship that they must efface the recollection of my death and

recall my services and my title to national gratitude. Adieu ! You know those whom I love. Be their comforter, and prolong by your care my life in their hearts. Adieu ! I press you, as well as my dear children, for the last time in my life, to my breast.—
ALEXANDRE B.”¹

Thus poor Beauharnais, possibly his own dupe, kept up to the end the fiction of family affection. For the last time he also reasserted his loyalty to Republican principles, leaving to his wife the duty of rehabilitating his memory. By July 23 his short and stormy life was over. “If few know how to live,” says Joséphine’s biographer,² “almost all know how to die,” and Alexandre de Beauharnais possessed that knowledge no less than others. It is unnecessary to dwell upon the final scene. The guillotine did its work ; his children were left fatherless ; their mother was at liberty to form fresh ties.

Beauharnais, by his death, may be said to have discharged his debts towards his wife. Upon his grave her future fortunes were built. For the rest, if hard measure has often been dealt out to him, it cannot be denied that he invites condemnation. Vain, wordy, theatrical, a moralist of phrases, a libertine who employed the language of a pharisee, a hot-headed neophyte who had adopted the Republican creed whilst probably incapable of assimilating its nobler elements—such was Hortense’s father. Yet the charge of

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i. p. 208.
Joséphine de Beauharnais (F. Masson), p. 234.

insincerity brought against him may be unfounded. In a great cataclysm a man with difficulty keeps his head so far as to gauge his position accurately ; and the infection of enthusiasm is easily mistaken for a genuine devotion to the object evoking it. Suddenly accorded the rank of leader and guide, Beauharnais, in posing before the world, may have deceived himself. Though the feat is possible, a man does not commonly carry on the conscious acting of a part to the brink of the grave, and his attitude to the end was that of a patriot who has loved and served his country. He met his fate, at any rate, with courage ; and whatever may have been his crimes or his weaknesses, he paid their utmost penalty when, at thirty-five, he died as a traitor to the Republic he believed himself to have served.

CHAPTER II

1795—1797

Joséphine's release—Established in the rue Chantereine—Hortense at school at Saint-Germain—Madame Campan—Joséphine's acquaintance with Napoleon Bonaparte—Hortense meets him—Joséphine's marriage—Training at Saint-Germain—Joséphine's absence in Italy—Her return—Hortense's acquirements—Émilie de Beauharnais's marriage.

IT was on July 23 that Alexandre de Beauharnais had met his death. Four days later came the fall of Robespierre, opening to Joséphine, as to so many others, the doors of her prison. Ten days more, and she was free.

Her captivity had not been without its advantages, heavily as they had been paid for. Not only did she emerge from it released from the ties binding her to a man avowedly indifferent to her, but the close association of prison life had led to the formation of additional useful friendships with those belonging to the old nobility, as well as with the more moderate Republicans now in power. The woman who was shortly to become the wife of Tallien had been her fellow captive; Tallien was her friend; nor was it long before she stood on intimate terms with Barras, the man of most note and influence at the moment.

It was with the party looking to him as a leader that she was chiefly allied. "Madame Bonaparte," he wrote, at a time when the connection between the two was a thing of the past, and the ancient kindness forgotten—"Madame Bonaparte—if one can say she was ever anything—had always personally belonged entirely to our party."¹

So far as politics were concerned, it was probably a matter of little interest to Joséphine, on the renewal of her relations with the outer world, to what section of opinion her friends belonged. After the terrible months during which her horizon had been blocked and bounded by the grave, the mere joy of living, the knowledge that the axe was no longer suspended over her head, must have done much, to a woman of her temperament, to render her indifferent to lesser considerations. She had clung to the hope of life, had cowered before the chance of losing it, with a pusillanimity contrasting sharply with the heroism displayed by most of those who shared her danger. And the greater her terror, the more overpowering her relief. Paris, not yet indeed an ideal dwelling-place for peaceful citizens, but ceasing to be deluged with blood, must have seemed to her a very Paradise. She was alive, was safe, and her children were with her. Poverty, it was true, stared her in the face, was indeed pressing upon her. Her husband's property was still sequestrated, supplies from Martinique were uncertain. Her needs, too—as at all stages of her

¹ *Mémoires de Barras*, t. i. p. 265.

career—were not small. Economy suited neither her tastes, her habits, nor her pleasure-loving nature ; and money was lacking, not only for luxuries, but for necessities of life. Those, however, brought into personal contact with Joséphine were commonly ready to do her service, and they were not slow, at the present juncture, in ministering to her needs. Family friends came to the rescue, claims on the nation were advanced and admitted, loans solicited and obtained, even dependants lent their savings, till at length she was in a position to rent a house in the rue Chantierine, and to furnish it to her liking.

Hortense was not with her mother when she took possession of this abode. The character of the dress-maker's apprentice had been discarded, and she had entered upon a new mode of existence, becoming a *pensionnaire* in the school bearing the somewhat pretentious title of the "Institution Nationale de Saint-Germain."

Madame Campan, foundress of this establishment, was eminently adapted for her post. The true governess is born, not made, and would equally belong to the class whatever might be her ostensible avocation in life. Her trade is not adopted at will, and laid aside so soon as her purpose in following it has been answered ; it is an integral part of herself. She may refrain from the open exercise of her craft, but a teacher she will remain to the end of her days. Such a woman was the preceptress in whose house Hortense had been placed, and who was charged with her hitherto

neglected education. Few as were the years spent at Saint-Germain by the pupil known in after-life as the Royalist Queen, they did not fail to leave their mark upon her ; and the intimate relations maintained in after-days between schoolmistress and scholar testify to Madame Campan's remarkable power of acquiring a permanent hold upon the children committed to her care.

Besides the inborn qualifications for the profession of schoolmistress possessed by the lady who ruled supreme at the Institution Nationale, others were not lacking. She had received a solid education, spoke English with ease, had been taught Italian by Goldoni, music by Albanesi, and was versed in classical literature. But of greater importance was the fact that she represented the traditions of a time belonging to an irrecoverable past. From the age of fifteen she had been attached to the court, first of Louis XV., and afterwards of his son, where she had occupied a post in the household of Marie Antoinette. At a day, therefore, when Parisian society was assuming a more normal aspect than of late, when the government had been reconstituted, and a desire to conform to older models was becoming increasingly manifest, Madame Campan was pre-eminently fitted to instruct the rising generation in the manners and graces of a former age, and she quickly became the fashion. Whilst in a measure the spokeswoman of the *ancien régime*, she had been skilful in adapting her methods to the present time. "To form habits of life,

develop the physical forces, cultivate the mind, polish the manners, and add to the ancient education a well-considered love of the native land—such was the object she proposed to herself.”¹ It was calculated to appeal no less to the moderate Republicans at the head of affairs than to the families of Royalist sympathies venturing by degrees to return to the country.

That her school supplied a felt need was quickly apparent. Pupils flocked to it. The house she had first taken at Saint-Germain soon proved too small for her requirements. Parents and guardians were eager to secure for their charges the advantages offered by her training, and amongst her *pensionnaires* came to be numbered many, if not most, of the children destined to become the wives of the prominent men of the empire.

It was to this place of learning that, after her childhood of many-coloured experiences, little Hortense was sent. On a certain day a lady, “aussi élégante que gracieuse,” was seen to arrive at Madame Campan’s school, accompanied by a girl and a boy; and presently the schoolmistress’s nieces—one of whom relates the incident—were summoned to be introduced to Mademoiselle Hortense de Beauharnais, their future schoolmate.

The newcomer made a favourable impression upon the little girls who were to be her companions. If she had not beauty she had grace, and was “as fresh as all the roses of spring”; she had charming eyes and

¹ *Correspondance de Madame Campan* (H. Buchon), t. i. p. 13.

a thicket of fair curling hair.¹ What Hortense thought of her comrades is not recorded. Possibly she reserved judgment, as she took her place amongst them, grave, as some say, beyond her years ; the indolence of her creole blood betraying itself in moods of idle reverie ; the love of pleasure strong within her, that of art and beauty perhaps still stronger ; and, through all, the gaiety of childhood, surviving past terrors and premature anxieties, and breaking out at inopportune moments in *fous rires*.

Hortense was probably located at Saint-Germain—Eugène had been placed there also, under the care of M. MacDermott, at the Collège Irlandais—when an event occurred attended with momentous consequences to both, namely, their mother's first meeting with the young Corsican General, Bonaparte, then emerging from obscurity. This took place in the autumn of 1795, when the revolt of the sections had led to a general confiscation of arms—a measure to which the first interview between the future husband and wife was indirectly due. According to most authorities, the surrender of the Vicomte de Beauharnais's sword had been demanded from his widow, when Eugène interposed, entreated permission to retain it, and was finally referred to Napoleon himself, to whom he carried his petition in person. Admitted to an interview with the General, the latter, touched by the boy's eagerness and by "some happy answers" that

¹ *Souvenirs de la Baronne Lambert, née Pannetier d'Arsonval*, quoted in *Hortense de Beauharnais* (C. d'Arjuzon), p. 316.

he made, not only granted his request, but furthermore conceived a desire to become acquainted with the family of the petitioner. He accordingly called upon Joséphine on the following day, and the acquaintance was inaugurated.¹

Such is in substance the account of the incident supplied by Napoleon, by Eugène, and by others. Barras categorically denies its truth. He asserts that at a dinner he gave at this juncture, Joséphine and her son being amongst the guests, he observed to the boy that his house was not of the number of those to be disarmed, his father's sword being that of a good Republican ; proceeding, as Bonaparte's superior officer, to commend mother and son to the General, and to place the Beauharnais residence under his protection.²

It is of little importance which version is the true one. The introduction was, at all events, effected ; what came of it is well known. That the young soldier lost no time in falling passionately in love is proved by a letter he addressed to Joséphine not six weeks after their first meeting ; but other motives conspired with sentiment to make him act upon what appeared like impulse, and strengthened his desire to make her his wife. To the young Corsican the Vicomtesse de Beauharnais represented a grade in the social scale he had not yet attained, and he regarded the marriage he was contemplating in the light of an

¹ *Mémoires du Prince Eugène*, t. i. p. 32 ; *Mémoires et souvenirs du Comte de Lavallette*, t. i. p. 151.

² *Mémoires de Barras*, t. i. p. 265.

advantageous alliance.¹ Nor was he altogether mistaken. Joséphine might be far from the *grande dame* she appeared in his eyes ; but so skilful had she been in utilising her opportunities that a union with the late prisoner of the Carmelites promised substantial aid to the fortunes of a man whose position was ill assured ; and Bourrienne describes a scene indicating that the expectation that such would be the case was not without its weight in determining his conduct. Pointing out to his future secretary a young lady present at some entertainment, Bonaparte observed that he was likely to marry her, his language proving that the match was, in his opinion, calculated to serve his ambition ; the same writer adding that the General's growing intimacy with Madame de Beauharnais had, in fact, the result of bringing him into touch with the most influential persons of the day.² It is further asserted that through his marriage with Joséphine he obtained from Barras the command of the Italian Army.

Joséphine, for her part, had not taken long in deciding to yield to the entreaties of the lover who was wooing her so eagerly. Her children, had the matter rested with them, would have settled it in quite another fashion, but their opinion was not likely to carry much weight. "Joséphine," says M. Masson, "a toujours été, sera toujours, trop femme pour avoir le loisir d'être mère,"³ and whatever may be thought

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 114.

² *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. i. p. 96.

³ *Napoléon et sa famille* (F. Masson), t. i. p. 133.



Portrait of Napoleon Bonaparte, A.W.A.M. 1800

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE.

of the justice of the criticism as applied to a later date, it is probable that at the present moment the thought of maternal obligations was subordinated to other considerations. Both Eugène and Hortense had been safely disposed of, and were engaged, whilst their mother was deciding the momentous question of her own fate, in pursuing their studies in their respective educational establishments at Saint-Germain; where, under Madame Campan's supervision, Hortense was receiving instructions in scholarship and religion, as well as in the lighter accomplishments to which her teacher has been charged with attaching overmuch importance.

It was in January, 1796, that the introduction of Joséphine's daughter to her future stepfather took place. At a dinner given by Barras, Bonaparte and Madame de Beauharnais were amongst the guests; Hortense, having perhaps been brought from Saint-Germain to be made acquainted with her mother's new friend, being also present. Placed at the table between Joséphine and the General, with whose name she was unacquainted, the child retained in after-years a vivid recollection of her impressions: "He leant forward to talk to her with so much animation and so perseveringly that I was tired and forced to draw back," she said. "He spoke with fire, and appeared occupied with my mother alone."¹

By March the marriage was an accomplished fact, and Joséphine's fate for good or ill was linked with that

¹ *Napoléon et sa famille* (F. Masson), t. i. p. 93.

of Napoleon. By neither of her children was the news greeted with satisfaction. To the boy the memory of the dead Beauharnais was invested with a glamour he had done little to merit. A second marriage was, in his son's eyes, a profanation ; nor did the splendour afterwards attaching to the connection ever cause the Prince to forget his sorrow at seeing his mother determined upon the formation of fresh ties.¹ Hortense, possibly infected by her brother's sentiments, was no better pleased. Returning from a half-holiday passed in Paris, she was observed to wear so melancholy a mien that, gathering round her, her companions inquired the cause of her dejection. She accounted for it by the explanation that her mother was about to marry General Bonaparte, adding that she was afraid of him, and feared he would be very severe to herself and Eugène.² Madame Campan, on the other hand, states that, unwilling to impart the news in person, Joséphine had charged her with the duty of breaking it to her pupil. The two accounts are not incompatible : the child, open-eyed and intelligent, may have formed her conclusions from what she had seen and heard during her visit to Paris, and Madame Campan's formal announcement may only have served to confirm her fears.

Under the circumstances it was by a prudent arrangement that the young and unfavourable critics

¹ *Mémoires du Prince Eugène*, t. i, p. 32.

² *MS. Souvenirs de Mademoiselle Pannetier*, quoted in *Hortense, de Beauharnais* (C. d'Arjuzon), p. 83.

of their mother's conduct were kept for the present at a distance from the scene of action. "Our dislike for a new marriage was known," says Prince Eugène, "and the pretext of desiring the completion of our education was made use of to send us to Saint-Germain."¹

Other reasons, besides the alleged desire to remove the boy and girl from Paris, may have made the continuation of their studies expedient. Hortense was thirteen, her brother a year or two older, and both had to make up for lost time. To Eugène his stepfather held out a powerful inducement to exertion by the promise, should he apply himself to recover his ground, to send for him to the army. The pledge was quickly redeemed, and Eugène's schooldays were not destined to be prolonged. From the first Bonaparte had testified a strong interest in both his wife's children; and if the recollections of Mademoiselle Pannelier, Madame Campan's niece and Hortense's schoolmate, are to be trusted, he found time, during the two days intervening between his wedding and his departure for the army, to pay a visit to Saint-Germain, inspecting the class-rooms, interrogating the frightened scholars, and ending by a promise to confide his little sister Caroline to Madame Campan's care.

"I must warn you," he added, "that she knows absolutely nothing. Try to give her back to me as learned as dear Hortense."

¹ *Mémoires du Prince Eugène*, t. i. p. 33.

When Caroline Bonaparte, in due course, arrived at Saint-Germain, her brother was proved to have been guilty of no exaggeration with regard to her lack of education ; she was unable so much as to read.¹ No doubt it was well that she should learn, but at fifteen she came as a most unwilling scholar—possibly already in love with Murat ; whilst her brother's indiscreet praises of his stepdaughter's attainments had inspired her with a natural aversion for the model proposed for her imitation which she is said never to have surmounted.²

If Hortense's alleged learning was a more doubtful matter than Caroline's ignorance, she displayed a singular aptitude in mastering the accomplishments upon which Madame Campan laid so much stress. In the most important of them all—*l'art de plaire*—she learnt to excel. Lessons upon the social arts were specially precise and detailed, and to the training supplied at Saint-Germain has been attributed part at least of the charm exercised by the generation of Frenchwomen educated either at Madame Campan's school or at others framed upon its model. If in some respects the system savoured of the pedagogue, the pupils could be trusted to modify it ; and in after-days Hortense—the most unlikely of women to

¹ At a later date her elder sister Pauline, then lately married to General Leclerc, was also placed, during her husband's absence, for six months under Madame Campan's care, in order that her neglected education might be carried on.

² *Souvenirs de la Baronne Lambert, née Pannetier d'Arsonval*, quoted in *Hortense de Beauharnais* (C. d'Arjuzon).

submit to be trammelled by rules in such matters—laughed as she recalled the injunctions of her old schoolmistress, and remembered that, according to her directions, the choice of subjects of conversation at dinner should be regulated, not by the tastes and inclinations of the guests, but by their number. If twelve were at table, travels and literature were to be discussed ; if eight, art, science, and new inventions. Politics and philosophy might supply a topic when only six were present ; when the party was limited to a quartette, affairs of sentiment, dreams of the heart, and romantic adventures were not forbidden. When two met together, “each talks of himself—a *tête-à-tête* belongs to the egoist.”

Such was the conversational system inculcated by Madame Campan, as described many years later by Hortense. “All my plans are deranged,” she would complain gaily, when unexpected guests arrived to dinner ; “I was intending to talk philosophy, and now literature and travels must be discussed.” ¹

It may have been with a view to the cultivation of her pupils' manners and as affording them an opportunity for the rehearsal of the part many of them were to play upon the Parisian stage, as well as with the object of increasing the popularity of the school, that the scholastic course at Saint-Germain was varied by entertainments many and divers. Balls were given (the lads belonging to the academy where

¹ *Correspondance Parisienne* (Delphine Gay—Madame Émile de Girardin), p. 352.

Eugène de Beauharnais with Jérôme Bonaparte were receiving their education being invited to serve as partners to Madame Campan's pupils), and theatrical performances took place, when Hortense had an opportunity of displaying her dramatic gifts before select audiences drawn from Paris.

After this fashion life must have passed pleasantly. It was true that, so long as her mother continued in straitened circumstances, Hortense had been at a disadvantage with regard to her companions ; and it is recorded that, found on one occasion by a schoolfellow in tears, it was discovered that her distress was caused by the condition of her wardrobe, no new frock having been sent to her, as to the rest of the children, at the beginning of the term. Her sympathetic companion sent home a report of the occurrence, with the result that material for a second dress was supplied at regular intervals, so long as the need for the gift remained.¹

At twelve years old, however, the lack of money is not a serious trouble, and in other respects the outlook was brightening. As news came home of the Italian campaign, Bonaparte's fame was ever increasing ; nor are indications wanting that his wife's children were reconciling themselves to their relationship to the young victor. "I have received a letter from Eugène and Hortense," he wrote to Joséphine after Arcola. "Those children are charming" ; and, on another occasion : "I have received a letter from Hortense ; she is quite amiable. I am going to write to her. I

¹ *Hortense de Beauharnais* (C. d'Arjuzon), pp. 104-5.

am very fond of her, and will soon send her the scents she desires." It is plain that, under Madame Campan's prudent guidance, her charges were fast learning to adapt themselves to circumstances and to make the best of the inevitable—a process Bonaparte continued to facilitate by his attentions.

"Write to those amiable children for me," he again bade his wife in July, "and send them some jewels. Assure them that I love them as my own children. What is yours and what is mine is so mingled in my heart that there is no difference between the two."¹

His language is the proof and the reflection of the genuine love borne by Joséphine to her son and daughter, a love even more ardently returned. Writing from his school, Eugène entreats his mother to visit him there—she does not remember that it is a month since he has seen her.² And Hortense is equally impatient. If it is the General's victories which are causing the delay, she could wish they were not so frequent and that she could see her dear little mother less rarely.³

The time for a longer separation between mother and children was at hand. Though Joséphine had not displayed any eagerness to follow her husband to Italy, she was given no choice in the matter. Napoleon was naturally anxious that his bride should join him, and she had no alternative but to accede to his wishes. On quitting Paris she left, according to Madame Campan,

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i. p. 51.

² *Napoléon et sa famille* (Masson), t. i. p. 139.

³ *Ibid.* t. i. p. 139.

both son and daughter under that lady's care.¹ To all three the parting was a painful one. Devotedly attached as Joséphine proved to be to her husband at a time when such attachment was at first a source of anxiety and later on of sorrow, in earlier days she was far from responding to his passion with a like degree of intensity ; and in a foreign country she sorely missed her children. Writing from Milan in the autumn of 1796, she made the Duc de Serbelloni the bearer of a letter addressed to her little daughter. "He will tell you," she wrote, "how much I think of you, and how much I love you. . . . I love you both to adoration."

Another letter, sent from Mantua in the spring of the following year, is written in the same spirit. "I cannot accustom myself to being so long absent from my dear children," she said, adding that the expectation of a speedy return to Paris sustained her. In the meantime she hopes that Madame Campan is pleased with Hortense ; and if the latter loves her *maman* as her *maman* loves her, she adores her.

The child, for her part, must have felt lonely, parted from the mother with whom most of her short life had been passed. So long as Eugène was at hand, the two will have consoled each other. For her brother Hortense's love, from first to last, was passionate. "Je ne vis que par la vie d'Eugène," Madame de Rémusat often heard her say in days when her personal happiness had made mournful shipwreck ;²

¹ *Mémoires de Madame Campan* (Carette), p. xix.

² *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. 1. p. 155.

and with him within reach she will have been better able to dispense with other affection. The summer of 1797, however, saw the boy's departure for Italy, where he was at once, at sixteen, appointed aide-de-camp to his stepfather, and found additional reasons for condoning his mother's conduct in entering upon a second marriage. More serious than his departure, in the eyes of his sister's schoolmates, must have been the fact that M. MacDermott had removed to Paris, his place and that of his scholars not having been satisfactorily filled. Already, in December, Hortense was looking forward to a carnival shorn of its accustomed merriment. It would be, she wrote to a friend, very *triste*, since, owing to M. MacDermott's absence, there would be few young men. It was true that M. Mestro had taken a house and was to carry on a school, but only little boys—*marmots*—would be there as yet. "Aussi je n'en veux pas," she adds with contempt. Compensations are, however, at hand. In a fortnight she hopes to see her mother, and "I will write to tell you of my happiness as soon as I know it myself."¹

Before the anticipated meeting with Joséphine, another was to take place. Napoleon reached Paris three weeks before his wife, and did not await her arrival to send for his stepdaughter. It must have been not without apprehension that the child prepared to obey the summons of the conqueror whose name was ringing throughout France, and who, scarcely more

¹ *Hortense de Beauharnais* (C. d'Arjuzon), p. 113.

than a stranger, had become so important a factor in her life. All, nevertheless, seems to have gone well, and her progress appeared to her stepfather so satisfactory that he not only invited her schoolmistress to dinner, in order that she might receive his personal acknowledgments, but gave her the assurance that, should his wife share his views, her daughter would remain at Saint-Germain for the present.

"According to this desire," wrote Madame Campan to another pupil, "I may hope to retain this amiable child, who has given me nothing but satisfaction, and has done me infinite credit."

On Joséphine's arrival in Paris it was natural that she should wish to keep temporary possession of the daughter from whom she had been parted ; nor would Hortense willingly have forgone the sight of the magnificent demonstrations in honour of a victor in whom she could feel a personal pride. But it was inevitable that Madame Campan should sigh over the consequent interruption to her pupil's studies, and in the end her protests prevailed and Hortense was once more surrendered to her care, returning, after the brilliant interlude furnished by Parisian festivities, to the routine of life at Saint-Germain.

It was in the course of this year that a report of her daughter's progress was supplied to Joséphine, by means of which it is possible to form a conception of her comparative proficiency in the various branches of study there pursued. In dictation, reading, and writing her place in her class is low. Her memory is in-

sufficiently cultivated ; sums and history are left blank. On the other hand, in drawing she holds the first place, in declamation the second ; whilst her dancing is commended. She is stated to possess valuable gifts ; and is good, obliging, good-tempered. Were she a little less *étourdie*, she would have all that is needed to do well. She is much less greedy, and regards her parents with all the tenderness and admiration that is their right.¹

The report probably gave Joséphine entire satisfaction. It was not in the more solid branches of knowledge that she would be most anxious that her daughter should excel. For the rest, Madame Campan will not have been prone to lay too much stress upon the deficiencies of a pupil connected closely with the popular idol, and to whose presence it was due that he was to do her the honour of visiting her school, and of witnessing there the performance of *Esther*, the title-rôle being of course assigned to his wife's daughter. All went off well, and Hortense acquitted herself so creditably that, observes her instructress complacently, "this piece excited a kind of interest it necessarily loses in public theatres."²

A cousin, Stéphanie de Beauharnais, some years younger than Hortense, had been likewise placed by Joséphine in Madame Campan's charge, and a tie was formed between the two which remained unaffected by time and changed circumstances, and afforded to

¹ *Hortense de Beauharnais* (C. d'Arjuzon), pp. 118-9.

² *De l'éducation* (Madame Campan)

the elder one of her chief consolations amidst the troubles and sorrows of later life.

In the meantime, besides the theatrical performances in fashion at Saint-Germain, another drama—this time in real life—was enacted there three days before Napoleon started for Egypt and at his express desire, the heroine of it being yet another Beauharnais. The young Comte de Lavallette had deserved well of his General, but his General was precluded by prejudice on the part of the Directory from promoting him according to his deserts. Casting about, therefore, for another method of rewarding his subordinate, it occurred to Napoleon to bestow upon him a wife in the person of Émilie de Beauharnais, niece to Joséphine, at present sharing Hortense's room at school and her educational advantages. The plan, carried out, would serve the double purpose of providing the young soldier with a charming bride and of assuring to the daughter of an *émigré* a certain position and rehabilitating her in the eyes of society. Besides these reasons, another, not less cogent, though it may have been desirable to keep it in the background, rendered Napoleon anxious for the match. His brother Louis, when visiting their little sister Caroline at Saint-Germain, had made the acquaintance of her fellow pupil, Émilie de Beauharnais. To the lad, of limited experience in such matters, she seemed the most beautiful person he had ever seen, and he had promptly lost his heart to her. The affair, young as were both boy and girl, might have ended in marriage. It was, however, no

part of Napoleon's scheme that his brother, by forming a connection with the daughter of an *émigré*, should place a dangerous weapon in the hands of his own enemies; and the measures he took to render it impossible were prompt and decisive. Émilie once bestowed upon Lavallette, Louis would be safe; and Napoleon would listen to no remonstrance on the part of the young man. Brushing the objections he raised summarily aside, he answered that marriage was a necessary thing, since to possess children was the great object of life; that should the Count be slain, his widow would be pensioned, and would have an opportunity of establishing herself well, whereas at present she was wanted by nobody and his wife was unable to take her into society. The child, he said, was worthy of a better fate. The affair must be pushed forward; the marriage should be celebrated in a week; the young officer should be granted a fortnight's leave for the enjoyment of his honeymoon; and then—*en route!*

Few had strength to withstand Napoleon's will, and Lavallette, yielding to his General, withdrew his protests. But would Émilie, he asked, be willing?

"She is a child, tired of school," answered Napoleon, with unflattering candour. It was clear that no loophole of escape was to be afforded to the reluctant bridegroom.

On the very next day a visit was paid to Saint-Germain, Bonaparte, his wife, Eugène, and Lavallette being of the party. It was a great event at the school.

A general holiday was granted in honour of the occasion, and the scholars crowded to the windows to look out, whilst Lavallette anxiously scrutinised those who invaded salons and courtyard, in the expectation of distinguishing amongst them the bride to whom he was almost a stranger. Presently she was brought in by Hortense, two or three years younger than her cousin, but apparently acting as mistress of the ceremonies. As he inspected his future wife it is evident, from Lavallette's account of his impressions, that he was becoming reconciled to his fate. Tall and graceful, with a charming face and brilliant colouring, she was so much overwhelmed with shyness as to move Bonaparte to laughter; and after luncheon, served on the grass, the Count took the management of affairs into his own hands. Begging Eugène to conduct his cousin into a solitary alley, he followed the two, and, Beauharnais having discreetly withdrawn began his hurried wooing. Telling Émilie of the necessary facts, his birth and his poverty—his sword and his General's goodwill were his sole possessions—he added that he was to leave France in a fortnight. Whatever, under these circumstances, were her wishes, she might count upon him to carry them out. If a marriage with him found her unwilling, he would see to it that no coercion was used to induce her to consent.

“Pour toute réponse elle sourit, et me donna le bouquet qu'elle tenait à la main.”¹ Behind the clipped

¹ *Mémoires de Lavallette.*

hedges in the solitary alley the two were hidden from curious eyes, and he kissed her before leading back his promised wife to the expectant company. Hortense, regarding the scene with the keen interest of her fifteen years, had no suspicion that her cousin's acquiescence had sealed her own fate. Émilie, if reluctant, was submissive ; a week later the marriage had taken place, and Louis Bonaparte had been effectually safe-guarded from the imprudence of linking his fortunes with hers.

CHAPTER III

1797—1800

Hortense at Plombières, and in Paris—Napoleon's return—Establishment of the Consulate—Hortense at the Tuileries—Relations with Madame Campan—Royalist sympathies.

HORTENSE'S studies were not destined to be continuous. It had been at first intended that Joséphine should follow her husband to the East. In the meantime she betook herself to Plombières, there to drink the waters. At this place she met with an accident, caused by the collapse of a balcony, involving a tedious period of convalescence, and leading her to summon her daughter to keep her company and to superintend her recovery. A mulatto woman, Joséphine's foster-sister, was despatched with Charvet, afterwards porter at Malmaison, to serve as escort to the delighted scholar, and the journey by coach was a pleasant one.

"Mademoiselle Hortense"—it is Constant, Napoleon's future valet, who speaks—"was, I will not say greedy, but *friande* to excess," and at each town the carriage was filled with sweetmeats, which promptly disappeared.¹

If the pupil was rejoiced at the interruption to her

¹ *Mémoires de Constant*, t. i. p. 37.

studies, the governess viewed it with dismay. During the three months spent at the little mountain watering-place, Madame Campan continued to watch over her favourite scholar from a distance, and to keep up her interest in all that was going forward at Saint-Germain. At the midsummer festivities, she informs the truant with pardonable pride, thirty carriages had waited in the street ; the first prize for drawing had been awarded by Isabey to the absentee herself ; her cousin, the new-made bride, Madame Lavallette, had come, charming and dressed like an angel, to revisit her former companions, and even "la superbe Madame Récamier" had been present.

When August found Hortense still at Plombières, Madame Campan's uneasiness at the prolongation of her holiday is manifest. "I hear nothing more of you," she wrote, "nor of your return. This suspension of your work grieves me, coming at the time when you are most in a position to bring your talents to perfection." Her room was kept vacant, and would remain so until she no longer needed it. The portrait that had been made of her was very like, but Madame Campan could find no appropriate verses to inscribe below. For Hortense, verses must be written specially. Gentle admonitions mingle with her flattery, and her ex-pupil is exhorted to be more careful in the matter of letter-writing, since "a woman's note, even to her dressmaker, may be seen by those who will judge from it whether the writer has been well or ill brought up."

Mademoiselle de Beauharnais, in attendance on her mother through the hot summer months, will have been secretly conscious that school-time lay behind her, and looking forward to a life in which study would play a subordinate part. But if she did not always act upon her schoolmistress's advice, she was grateful for the love and sympathy that were lavished upon her, and remained faithful to her old teacher to the end.

At the present moment sympathy was more superfluous than Madame Campan guessed. In July, apparently reflecting a passing mood of dejection in her correspondent, she was writing that a small town in the mountains with scanty society was not calculated to prove an amusing place of residence.¹ But as Joséphine recovered from the effects of her fall, her daughter was not likely to suffer from dulness. Amongst other amusements, considerable entertainment had been afforded to the visitors by an attendant annexed by Joséphine at this time, who remained long in her service. A native of the watering-place, and a sort of modern counterpart of the professional fool, Carrat, shrewd in spite of his folly, may have divined that the wife of Bonaparte was a patroness worth propitiation. At any rate, he was assiduous in his attentions, bringing her offerings of flowers and addressing to her compliments couched in language causing Hortense to give way to the wild bursts of merriment for which she was noted in these early days. The fool,

¹ *Correspondance de Madame Campan*, t. i. p. 7.

however, was a clever fool ; he knew his business ; his *niaiserie* proved a serviceable quality in a laughing world, and when, on the approach of the date fixed upon for the departure of the visitors, he had the good feeling to break into weeping and lamentation, Joséphine, always kindly and good-natured, determined to take him with her to Paris, and attached him permanently to her household in the character of coiffeur.

By October the party, including Carrat, had returned to Paris. The intention that Madame Bonaparte should join her husband had been relinquished, and with the exception of occasional visits paid by Hortense to Saint-Germain, when her intermitted studies were temporarily resumed, she probably remained with her mother until the return of Bonaparte from Egypt at the end of 1799. Nor can her life have been devoid of amusement. Notwithstanding the insecure basis of the government, the terrorism by which it was maintained, and the factions dividing the city, Paris was not otherwise than gay. A certain risk continued to attach to a display of luxury, and rendered entertainments at private houses rare ; but in public places they were much in fashion, nor was Joséphine, despite her husband's absence, inclined to forgo her customary pleasures.

At *réunions d'abonnés* every shade of opinion and all classes were represented, men and women of Royalist sympathies mingling freely with the various sections of Republicans and finding their amusement in the same

salons. In company thus mixed it behoved careful mothers to keep a watchful eye upon their daughters, and a story is told of a certain Madame de Damas, who, arriving late at the Hôtel Thélusson, found her attention arrested by the figure of a girl, with a charming face, fair hair and dark blue eyes, who, having been dancing with M. de Trenis, "the Vestris of the salons," was brought back by her partner to a woman, exquisitely dressed, who might have been taken for her elder sister. Turning to her companion, the old Marquis de Hautefort, Madame de Damas inquired the names of the two.

"You do not recognise the Vicomtesse de Beauharnais," he replied. "It is she and her daughter. She is now Madame Bonaparte. *Tenez !*" he added, "there is a vacant place next her. Come and sit there ; you will renew your acquaintance."

For all reply, Madame de Damas drew him hastily into one of the smaller side apartments. "Are you mad ?" she asked. "A good place next Madame Bonaparte ! Ernestine would have been forced to make her daughter's acquaintance. You are losing your head, Marquis."

"*Ma foi*, no," protested the Marquis. "What harm would there be in Ernestine becoming acquainted with Mademoiselle Hortense de Beauharnais, and even in making friends with her ? She is a charming person—gentle, amiable."

"What has all that to do with it ?" demanded his friend impatiently. "I will have nothing to say to



From a painting by Jacques-Louis David.

THE EMPRESS JOSEPHINE.

women of the kind. I have no liking for those who dishonour their misfortune.”¹

The little scene, whether or not accurately reported, gives the key to the view, justly or unjustly, taken in some quarters of the woman to whom, in so short a time, presentation was to be an honour. Hortense, however, will have been happily ignorant of the drawbacks attaching to her mother's position, and have enjoyed to the full her initiation into the pleasures of Parisian life.

At Malmaison, too—a humble residence in comparison with what it afterwards became—acquired by Joséphine about this time, there were cheerful parties; when, in the comparative seclusion of the country, her newly acquired attendant, Carrat, served to minister to the general amusement. Continuing to exhibit the traditional features of the jester, he was apt to make use of his privilege of free speech, chiding his mistress in particular for any over-generosity or familiarity she might display in dealing with his fellow-servants.

“It is like you, Madame,” he would grumble; “you joke with your domestics. *Eh bien!* on the first occasion they will show you disrespect.” Her conduct towards himself was a different question. “You should give me that,” he would tell her calmly, when chancing to covet any of her possessions.

On the other hand, he was himself apt to be made the victim of practical jokes. Being noted for his lack of courage, it was arranged that a spectre, draped in white, should rise from a ditch to terrify him, Hortense

¹ *Mémoires de la Duchesse d'Abrantès*, t. i. pp. 364, 366.

and her mother remaining at hand to watch the effect ; whilst on another occasion a more elaborate conspiracy was formed for the purpose of playing upon the fool's nervous terrors. Not only were the supports of his bed removed, so that it should give way beneath him, but a vase of water had been so arranged that the contents were discharged upon him in the darkness, the voice of Hortense adding to his consternation. " Ah ! *maman*," she cried, " the toads and frogs in the water will fall upon his face ! "

In his indignation Carrat did not measure his language. " It is a horror, an atrocity, Madame, thus to play tricks upon your servants," he cried indignantly.¹ Carrat was right, but the scene is an example of the manners and customs prevailing at Malmaison at this date.

Meanwhile Napoleon was in the east, and as the campaign was indefinitely prolonged, Joséphine sometimes met with treatment suggestive of the uneasy reflection that those who thus dealt with her might be in possession of facts rendering it, in their eyes, safe to slight his wife. Of the light in which she regarded his continued absence it is impossible to speak with greater certainty than of the stories to her discredit current about this time. Of the weight attached by Napoleon to these scandals he was to give proof upon his return. But whatever may be the precise amount of truth contained in the reports he had received, whether through the medium of his family, con-

¹ *Mémoires de Constant*, t. i, pp. 11-12.

sistently and solidly hostile to his wife, or by means of other channels of information, it is likely that apprehension rather than joy was her predominant sentiment on learning, on October 10, 1799, that he had unexpectedly landed at Fréjus.

The whole of Paris was electrified by the news. Napoleon in the east might be in a measure disregarded. At hand, he was a force of incalculable power. The Directory was disorganised, factions were at war each with each, no one party being supreme. It was felt that, with Bonaparte once more present, all things were possible, that a factor had been introduced into the political situation whose effect could not be foreseen or measured.

"If it were a change in the Republic," said Madame de Permon, mother of the future Duchesse d'Abrantès, when her son, entering the salon where her guests were assembled, asked them to hazard a guess as to the intelligence he had to impart, "you could not give it greater importance."

"*Ma foi !*" he replied, "what you have said in jest may well come to pass. Bonaparte is in France." ¹

To every Parisian the event was of the utmost moment ; to Joséphine it was a matter of life and death. She had ceased, in Madame de Rémusat's opinion, to reckon upon such a contingency, and when she learnt, at a dinner at the house of Gohier, member of the Directory, that her husband was actually on French soil, it was whispered that she had seemed less rejoiced than

¹ *Memoires de la Duchesse d'Abrantès*, t. i. p. 96.

should have been the case. Whatever might be her private sentiments, it was nevertheless necessary to face the crisis, and she took her measures promptly. Accompanied by her brother-in-law Louis and by Hortense, she set out to meet the traveller on his way from the coast. If she had hoped to disarm him by a show of eagerness, her plan was a failure. Ignorant of his intended route, she missed him on the way ; and when Napoleon reached the house in the rue Chante-reine, he found it empty and deserted.

Unreasonable as was the inference, the lack of a welcome appeared to her husband a confirmation of his worst fears ; his family—Joséphine's foes—were at hand and ready to make use of the opportunity to fan the flame of his anger ; and when his wife returned, it was to find him shut into his room and the door barred against her. In vain she attempted, by passionate appeals, to effect a reconciliation. Like Beauharnais, and perhaps with more justice, he had judged and condemned her. At length, as a last resource, she had recourse to her children, and Eugène and Hortense were summoned to add their supplications to her own. Where she had failed, they were successful. Napoleon was fond of both ; the charges against their mother—a sufficient answer to other mediators—could not be uttered to the children of the wife he suspected of unfaith ; his weapons were wrenched from his hands ; the conqueror was defeated.

“Do not forsake our mother—it will kill her,” they pleaded, possibly believing what they said. Must

they themselves, they urged further, already orphaned, be again deprived of their protector? Bonaparte yielded. It is said that he attempted a compromise, promising to care for Eugène's interests no less than before; but, adopting the line to which he afterwards consistently adhered, the lad was firm in his refusal to separate his fortunes from those of his mother, and in the end filial sentiment, embodied in the children Napoleon had in some sort adopted, won the day. Sending them to fetch Joséphine, waiting, alone and wretched, to learn her fate, he gave her his full and free forgiveness.¹

Such scenes take place, the curtain falls, and they appear to be forgotten. But their effect remains. Condonation is not oblivion, nor do children's tears, though availing to cancel a sentence, blot out the verdict upon which it was based. When, ten years later, statecraft and policy caused Napoleon to put away his wife, who can say to what extent he felt justified, before the tribunal within, by the facts he had seemed to erase from his memory?

It is only possible to guess at the interpretation placed by Eugène and Hortense upon what had occurred. Devotedly attached to their mother, they may have formed no definite conception of the causes to which their stepfather's wrath had been due. Ignorance of evil had, however, been no part of Hortense's training, and even at an earlier date there is proof that she was

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. pp. 147-8; *Mémoires de la Duchesse d'Abrantès*, t. i. pp. 103-4.

acquainted with facts of which children are for the most part happily unsuspecting. In a letter from Madame Campan belonging to the May of this year, she recounts a scene when, reading to her pupil a communication she had received concerning some little waif and stray left discreetly anonymous, Hortense had at once demanded whether the child in question was her poor father's. "We have already," she had added, "a little girl of whom we take care—Eugène and I. She is charming, and we will not abandon this one."

"Such is my Hortense," wrote Madame Campan ; "am I not right to love her with all my heart ?" ¹ Nor does the precocious knowledge displayed appear to have struck the teacher as anomalous or melancholy.

Napoleon's *coup d'état* and the establishment of the Consulate followed quickly upon the arrangement of his domestic affairs. Two days before the 18th Brumaire—that epoch-making date—Hortense, with Caroline Bonaparte, had been abruptly sent back to Saint-Germain. It was there that the news of Napoleon's fresh achievement reached them. Caroline, making the most of her time, had left a lover in Paris in the person of Murat ; and so soon as success was assured, four of his dragoons were dispatched to carry the intelligence to Saint-Germain. The sleeping household was aroused by a loud knocking at the gate, followed by the announcement that the brother of one of the pupils and the stepfather of

¹ Quoted in *Madame Louis Bonaparte* (d'Arjuzon), p. 13.

another had once more triumphed. Wakened thus unceremoniously from her slumbers, it was perhaps natural that Madame Campan should have considered the haste displayed by Murat unnecessary, and should have been loud in her condemnation of his method of imparting the news ; but as Caroline, on the contrary, welcomed it as a proof of his gallantry and his love, he will not have been inconsolable under a sense of the schoolmistress's displeasure.¹

The 18th Brumaire marked the close of Hortense's connection with the scholastic establishment at Saint-Germain. Her visits to it thenceforth were those of a favourite guest. When, in a few days, she joined her mother at the Petit Luxembourg, where the First Consul had taken up his residence, she had left childhood behind her, and was fairly launched upon life. Her career as *pensionnaire* had been a successful one. In later years she looked back upon the period spent at Saint-Germain as one of happiness ; and she quitted it, to use Madame Campan's flowery language, reigning over a hundred young hearts, as well as, for life, over that of her governess. She was now to exercise the charm that had won her popularity at school in a wider sphere.

Hortense de Beauharnais was at this time close upon seventeen. Though possessing no positive beauty or regularity of feature, she had both attraction and grace. Her face, framed in her fair curling hair, had the

¹ *Napoléon et sa famille* (Masson), t. i. p. 306.

freshness of a flower. Her eyes were dark blue, her complexion was pale, faintly tinted with rose-colour, her figure at once slight and rounded; she held her head erect. Lucien Bonaparte, whose description, as that of a man with no liking for his brother's stepdaughter, may be acquitted of flattery, states that she was "ni bien, ni mal." She had, he admits, beautiful arms, a lovely complexion, danced *à ravir*, sang fairly well, played the harp, and drew correctly. Her face, like all those depending for charm on colour, mood, and expression, rather than upon outline or form, probably created a different impression according to the point of view from which the owner was regarded; and, from a Bonaparte, the modified degree of praise accorded by Lucien has its weight.

In character she was, in these happy days of her girlhood, both gentle and gay—"parfaitement bonne," says the Duchesse d'Abrantès¹—with sufficient keen-wittedness to save her conversation from the charge of insipidity. She had, in addition and in a special degree, the valuable faculty—retained to the end—of winning affection from those with whom she was brought into contact.

Madame de Rémusat, the companion of her childhood, and who, as *dame du palais* to Joséphine, had afterwards exceptional opportunities of observation, makes an attempt to analyse the character and nature of the woman she loved. Hortense, in her judgment, was an idealist who, with a natural bent towards

¹ *Mémoires de la Duchesse d'Abrantès*, t. ii. p. 416.

goodness and purity, had created a sphere of her own, whose laws she alone recognised as of binding force. Pure, upright, and "with an absolute ignorance of the world," the morality built upon social usage was a dead-letter so far as she was concerned.¹ She never learnt to bring her life into conformity with those conventions which shield a woman from her enemies, and save, if not her character, at least her reputation.

If Madame de Rémusat's appreciation is correct, never was an adventurer on life's sea more in need of a pilot or less adapted, unassisted, to steer her course with wisdom and prudence. Granted that the idealist has strength of principle and force of will to govern his conduct according to the standards he has set up, the hero or the saint is the result. But more commonly, learning that the laws he acknowledges can with difficulty be applied to the conduct of life, and becoming hopeless of establishing a correspondence between the ideal and the real, he half-unconsciously agrees to a compromise, and, allowing his moral axioms to retain their theoretical value, practically disconnects them from the government of action. He effects, in fact, the time-honoured separation between faith and practice, and, relinquishing his rudder, is more at the mercy of waves and currents than others who embarked with humbler aspirations. Such, in some sort, may have been the fate of Hortense, who, in Madame de Rémusat's opinion, was the most unhappy woman of her time. "I have seen her very

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 153.

close," adds her friend, "I have ended by knowing all her secrets, and she has always seemed to me the purest, as the most unfortunate, of women."¹

For good or ill, she was launched upon life, as represented at the Consular Court, with no one at hand better fitted to act as a guide than a mother, warm-hearted, good-natured, amiable, brimming with kindness, and possessed, according to so good a judge as Metternich, of a "tact social tout particulier," but pleasure-loving, vain, light-minded, and frivolous, and ready, when her interests demanded it, to sacrifice her daughter to them. Cast in a different mould, with a certain severity of judgment and, in spite of her visionary and imaginative strain, not otherwise than clear-sighted, Hortense might and did love her mother; but she could not trust to her judgment or lean upon her. "Madame Louis," to quote Madame de Rémusat once more, "s'est toujours trouvée sans guide."² It is well to remember it.

At this early period she is not likely to have realised the want of a pilot; and by whatever perils she might be surrounded, the next two years were probably the happiest of her life. Not only was the future before her, with all the untested possibilities which belong to the confident outlook of the young and to the looker-on are touched with the pathos of predestined disillusion, but the present was filled to overflowing with enjoyment. To give a detailed account of this

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 155.

² *Ibid.* t. i. p. 154.

time would be to present a monotonous catalogue of *fêtes*, ministerial, public, and private, of balls, dramatic entertainments, pleasures of every description, whether the scene was laid at the Tuileries, to which the First Consul and his wife had removed, or at Malmaison. Life was resolved into a perpetual carnival. And at all times, amongst the young and the gay gathered round the First Consul and his wife, her daughter was the most prominent figure, the natural, but also the chosen, leader of the revels. She was *à la mode*.

Of Parisian society at this date Madame de Chastenay has given a curious and interesting picture. It is a picture, to use her own simile, of a forest from which the old and withered trees have disappeared, replaced by new and vigorous growths, ever putting forth fresh branches. Of the older generation, many were absent in foreign lands, many were dead, and those who remained were relegated to the background of the stage. Upon the soil left vacant a new society had suddenly sprung into being. The young men had married young girls; life had become simple, gay, unluxurious, moral. Youth was everywhere in evidence, everywhere triumphant. “ Dans cette société, où les amusements étaient si bien en train, la plus vieille femme avait vingt ans.” It was an interlude in the serious business of life. When men were not called to be soldiers, they were content to do nothing but to enjoy. A year later, with the return of the *émigrés*, perhaps with the mere lapse of time, changes

came, and the ordinary routine of existence resumed its sway.¹

At the Consular Court youth was specially predominant. Napoleon was scarcely over thirty ; most of the generals who had won their laurels in Italy or Egypt were even younger. Many were following his example, and hastening to marry. There was reason for it. When the uncertainty of life, the chances of fresh campaigns, the possibility of the intervention of a bullet at no distant date in the arrangement of affairs, were taken into account, no time was to be lost in tasting every joy the world had to give. As with Lavallette, so it might be with his brothers-in-arms : a fortnight's honeymoon, and then—*en route* ! Thus marriage-bells were for ever ringing. Not two months after she had left school, Caroline Bonaparte, a year older than Hortense, had married Murat. Napoleon, at first reluctant to bestow his sister's hand upon the son of an innkeeper, had yielded to Caroline's importunities, supplemented by those of Joséphine, her son, and her daughter,² and his little sister had her way, so much in love that Madame Campan is found entreating her ex-pupil, as a personal favour, not to indulge in demonstrations of affection at the theatre. Mademoiselle Laure de Permon, the future Duchesse d'Abrantès, was to make a love marriage with Junot, another of Napoleon's generals, at the end of 1800 ; Madame de Rémusat was already a bride ; Eglé Auguié, Madame

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Chastenay*, t. i. p. 412.

² *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. iii. p. 147.

Campan's niece and Hortense's lifelong friend, was to become two years later the wife of Ney ; and so with many others.

It was no wonder if the First Consul's stepdaughter, though, unlike her mother, her tastes were by no means restricted to amusement and the *toilette*, should have been carried away for a time by the whirl of excitement in which her days were passed, and that she should sometimes have omitted to respond to the missives constantly reaching her from Saint-Germain. But Madame Campan was a practical woman, accustomed to dealing with the young. She had determined, partly doubtless from motives of disinterested attachment, partly it may be from a desire to maintain a useful connection with those in power, to retain her hold upon her late pupil ; and to gentle reproaches she added a suggested remedy for the neglect of which she complained. Let Hortense ask her mother to supply her with an *escritoire*, and all things necessary for the writing of letters, since a mere nothing might be responsible for the non-fulfilment of this duty ; nor does Hortense seem for the future to have been backward in referring her difficulties, as they arose, to her prudent counsellor at Saint-Germain.

The removal of the consular household from the Petit Luxembourg to the palace of the Kings of France, attended by a magnificent and an ostentatious display well calculated to accentuate its importance, had taken place in February ; and no sooner was Mademoiselle de Beauharnais established in her new quarters than

Madame Campan, superintending her instalment from a distance, addressed to her an epistle of mingled congratulation and admonition. Though it must have seemed a strange thing to the lady-in-waiting of the dead Queen that the *parvenue*, Joséphine, and her daughter should be in possession of Marie Antoinette's chambers, she was a wise woman, and neither surprise nor bitterness was allowed to appear.

"You are in a pretty room," she wrote, calling to mind her old haunts; "let me follow you thither with my tenderness and advice." The advice was detailed and precise. Hortense is enjoined to be regular in hours and habits, and in especial must never be seen at her windows, always to be heedfully curtained. Never had "she who had inhabited the Tuileries"—thus is Marie Antoinette designated—suffered the young persons in whom she took an interest to display themselves in this manner. Hortense is surrounded by dangers. At balls she must not be cheapened by being overmuch on view. Women who are *légère* should be avoided.¹ This last injunction must have been difficult to observe. Reading between the lines of Madame Campan's letters, filled with directions on all matters, trivial and important, it is impossible to escape the conviction that the writer was well aware of the unfitness of the *chère maman* to whom she so often refers to safeguard her daughter from errors or mistakes—may even have suspected that by unkind critics Joséphine might be included in the very class of women she entreats

¹ *Correspondance de Madame Campan*, t. i. p. 30.

her pupil to shun. But for this there was no help. It only remained by every means in her power to supplement deficiencies at home.

If Madame Campan desired to retain her influence, she had, to some extent, succeeded, and a dilemma at this time confronting the aspirant to artistic excellence was referred to her judgment. Isabey was Hortense's old and faithful teacher, and must by no means be wounded by a dismissal. On the other hand, she had conceived a strong desire to profit by the instructions of David, and, torn between loyalty to ancient kindness and the exigencies of an artistic education, had turned to demand from Madame Campan a solution of the difficulty. Her adviser was ready to grapple with the situation. Isabey, she was of opinion, must not be discarded. Not only would he be in despair, but enemies would be created amongst the partisans possessed by every artist. Nevertheless, it was not necessary that Hortense should forgo the advantages she coveted. Her exclusive patronage must be given to neither artist. Whilst continuing to draw with Isabey, she was to take lessons in painting from a pupil of David's school, replying to her original teacher, should he offer her instruction in that branch of his art, that she was pledged to her new master. Were the pupil of David, on the other hand, to desire her to abandon drawing, on the score that it would render her cold, she was to decline to yield to his instances. "You will continue without believing it, and you will do well." If further questions arose, Hortense—or

she and her present counsellor conjointly—would consider how they were to be met.

On matters of more importance Madame Campan did not shrink from bestowing admonitions upon the First Consul's stepdaughter when they appeared to be needed. At a gathering at Saint-Germain in the month of April, 1800, when more than fifty guests had visited the school, her former scholar, installed at the Tuileries and an object of critical observation, had supplied a subject of discussion. Amongst those taking part in the conversation was a speaker who, whilst lavishing infinite praise upon Hortense, had added that her manners with women were cold, and that she would do well to distinguish those who merited it, and to display the grace natural to her in their reception. Towards men, it had been admitted, her coldness was an advantage, as keeping them at a proper distance, and in other respects her manners were allowed to be perfect. But with her gift for drawing, observed Madame Campan's informant, she ought to be conversant with the uses of light and shade, and able to discover the fitting tint.¹ The conversation was duly reported to the subject of it, in the hope, no doubt, that she would profit by the strictures of her critic.

If Hortense de Beauharnais laid herself at times open to blame, it can scarcely be wondered at. To one lately a schoolgirl and of no account, it can have been no easy task so to regulate her behaviour as to

¹ *Correspondance de Madame Campan*, t. i. p. 71.

conciliate those worth conciliation, to avoid giving offence, and to occupy her prominent position with grace and dignity. Moments indeed there must have been when that position struck her as singular. It was reported that her preference was for Royalist society. "Oddly enough," says Madame de Chastenay, "Mademoiselle de Beauharnais went with her mother to most of our [Royalist] balls, and was by way of taking pleasure in our society alone, and of detesting the novel greatnesses of her stepfather."¹ Whether the dislike was altogether sincere may be questioned. But the memory of the displaced and hereditary Kings of France may well have appealed to the sympathies of an imaginative nature. In spite of her habit of indulging in *fous rires*, and notwithstanding the constant excitement of her present life, there were times when she would fall into her old habits of reverie, and at these moments the thought of the past, by the grave of which she stood, and the remembrance of the wandering heirs of the ancient dynasty, may have coloured her dreams, and the very walls have seemed impregnated with the memories of other days. She made no secret of her partisanship, and the political proclivities of his "little Chouanne" or "Vendéenne" were regarded by her mother's husband with the amused indulgence accorded to a child's irresponsible follies. He was secure enough in his position to afford to smile when she observed, watching him handling his sword, that another—that of Constable—

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Chastenay*, t. i. p. 418

would better become him, or to listen good-humouredly when she observed that, would he but imitate Monk, her mother might be a Duchess. "She is better than that," was the reply of the head of the Republic. "She is my wife."

His attitude towards the heir of the Bourbons became a more practical question when letters were addressed by the future Louis XVIII. to the man he recognised as controlling the destinies of France, inviting him to lend his aid to the re-establishment of the monarchy. Nor was pressure near at hand wanting to induce him to return a favourable answer. "Both Joséphine and Hortense," says his secretary, "conjured him to give the King hopes. He would thereby be committed to nothing, and would gain time to see whether he would not, in the end, be able to play a greater part than that of Monk."¹

On this occasion Napoleon's indulgence was touched with impatience. "These devils of women are mad," he told Bourrienne. "The Faubourg Saint-Germain has turned their heads. They have made themselves into guardian angels of the Royalists. It does not matter to me. I am not angry with them."

But though not angry, he remained unaffected by feminine sentiment, nor did the suggestion that he should become the instrument of a French Restoration attract him. He loved his wife, he was fond of her daughter; but he pursued his path uninfluenced by their wishes.

¹ *Mémoires de Bourrienne.*

CHAPTER IV

1800—1801

Joséphine's position—Her extravagance—Paris under the Consulate—
An evening at the Tuileries—Attempt on Napoleon's life—Mal-
maison—Dramatic entertainments—Joséphine's fears—Journey to
Plombières—Again at Malmaison.

IN spite of the conviction Joséphine may have cherished that the position of a man to whom the restoration of the monarchy should have been due would be more secure than any other to be achieved by Bonaparte, she can have had little time or attention to spare for politics. The future, as well as the past, must have been for the most part blotted out by the present, with its constant excitement, its fears, and its hopes. Already she was at times troubled by the haunting spectre of divorce. In an early letter included in a spurious collection published soon after her death, and of which the authenticity was denied by her son, Joséphine is represented as making a sufficiently reasonable forecast of the result should she yield to Napoleon's entreaties and become his wife. "Being past my first youth," she is made to write to her aunt, "can I hope to be long the object of the violent tenderness which is, in the General, like the delirium of

fever ? If, after our union, he should cease to love me, would he not reproach me with what he had done for me ? Would he not regret a more brilliant marriage that he might have made ? What should I then answer ? What should I do ? I should weep."

The author of the letter was wise after the event. At the date of the marriage Joséphine would have been justified in considering the advantages not too unequally balanced ; but Napoleon's rise had been strangely rapid, the relative positions of the two were changing fast, and a touch of apprehension mingled with the joy and pride of the childless wife, foreshadowing the time when she would indeed weep, the more bitterly owing to a cause that the anonymous writer had omitted to take into account. It is not impossible that in doing so he had been right. Joséphine might, in looking on, have reckoned in the possibility of coldness on the part of the man who had loved her so well. It is unlikely that she had remembered that the parts might be reversed, and that she might have learnt by that time to love him with all the affection and devotion of which her nature was capable.

In the days of the Consulate the dread of divorce was in its infancy. But other practical causes of trouble existed ; and small as they were in comparison, were sufficient to interfere with the even and tranquil tenor of domestic life. Raised from actual indigence to ease, if not as yet to wealth, Joséphine's taste for luxury and display had outstripped the change in her condition, and, unrestrained by fear of her

husband's anger, was the source of constant friction between the two. Had she faced him boldly, it might have been better ; but her tactics on such matters were those of a spendthrift and a coward. When forced to tardy confession by the necessity of obtaining the means of satisfying her creditors, it was her custom to resort, in the hope of mitigating Napoleon's wrath, to the expedient of falsifying the sum required for the payment of her debts, a recurrence of the same scene, with reproaches on the one side and tears upon the other, being the natural result of the disingenuous mode of procedure.¹

Notwithstanding, however, lurking fears of what the future might bring forth, notwithstanding petty dissensions in the present, the incessant round of gaiety continued without interruption. It almost appeared as if Paris were afraid to afford itself leisure to think, lest it might be troubled by importunate memories and haunted by the scenes of blood and carnage by which, a few years earlier, its streets had been disgraced. Like a canvas where the great dark stains and blotches have been hastily painted over—such is the Paris of that day, with its ceaseless merry-making, its laughter and its mirth.

And of the life of the nation Napoleon was the centre. It must have seemed that he had only to ask and to receive—that all things were within his reach. Yet to whatever heights his ambition might have secretly risen, he proceeded with caution, steadily

¹ *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. i.

discouraging Joséphine's inclination to assume a certain amount of state, grant audiences, and intermeddle with public affairs. The domestic arrangements of the Tuileries and of Malmaison were conducted rather on the lines of a private house than as taking on the guise of a court ; etiquette and ceremony were minimised ; the First Consul's wife was attended by no *dames de compagnie*, and her guests were received (except on great public occasions) as it were *en famille*.

Madame Junot's description of her presentation at the Tuileries on the occasion of her marriage, in December, 1801, although it may owe some of its details to imagination, supplies a graphic picture of the interior of the palace before it had changed its character.

An appointment for a late hour had been given to the newly married couple ; and upon the wheels of their carriage becoming audible in the salon, Eugène de Beauharnais hurried downstairs, sent by his mother to make sure that, by some mistake, the guests were not refused admission. The sixteen-year-old bride afterwards recalled the young man's kindly words of encouragement as he led her to his mother's presence. She was not, he told her, to be afraid—his mother and sister were so good. It was nevertheless probably not without some trepidation that she entered the great apartment, dimly lit by shaded tapers, at the end of which Joséphine was sitting at one side of the hearth. Hortense was on the other ; and with her slender figure, her beautiful hair, her graceful manners, and

her gentle words Mademoiselle de Beauharnais *plaisait impérativement*. Such was the verdict of the guest, a year younger than she. Napoleon was present to receive the bride, whom he had known as a child, and a pleasant and homely scene ensued.

“Oh, oh, Joséphine,” interrupted the First Consul, as his wife with kisses was assuring the stranger that she should find in her a friend, “you go fast! How do you know that that little *lutin* is worthy of any love? *Eh bien*, Ma’amselle Loulou—you see I do not forget my old friends’ names—have you not a good word for me?”

Thus the interview proceeded, Hortense joining from time to time in the talk, and Bonaparte expressing his wish that the young wives of his generals should be friends of Joséphine and her daughter, in the same way that their husbands were his own; and so the visit terminated.¹ In Madame Junot’s account of it occurs a name of which the owner was to have a negative influence of importance upon Hortense’s life. Duroc, she says, was present.

Close upon Madame Junot’s bridal visit followed her wedding ball, attended by the First Consul himself—an event of the greater moment since, though an old friend of her mother’s,² the two had been lately estranged. To-night causes of disagreement were forgotten. The ball was opened by the bride with Eugène

¹ *Mémoires de la Duchesse d’Abrantès*, t. i. pp. 405-6.

² It was said that there had been question of a marriage between Madame de Permon and Napoleon.

de Beauharnais ; Hortense danced with Junot ; Joséphine was garlanded with flowers.

“ I do not understand how one can wear wreaths of flowers when one is forty,” said the beautiful Pauline Leclerc contemptuously, as she looked at her sister-in-law. But then, as Madame Junot, to whom the remark was made, observes, Joséphine’s exquisite toilettes were a never-failing source of annoyance to her husband’s sister, and her scoff was a tribute to their success.

It had been early winter when the *bal de noce* took place—one entertainment out of many, save that few were honoured by the presence of the head of the State. Yet, gay as was Paris, Hortense was not so much absorbed in her amusements as to have no time to bestow upon her favourite pursuits, and in her little *cabinet de travail*—only just large enough to make the smell of the oil paints tolerable—she had been painting, about this time, the portrait of her brother. Did her thoughts, one wonders, as she worked, wander back to the past, when, not so many years ago, she was daily seeking the Carmelites prison clad in her apprentice’s garb, and her model was passing through the Paris streets in his workman’s blouse and with a plank upon his shoulder ?¹ Did a sense of insecurity ever creep over her as she reflected that the entire edifice of her fortunes and of her brother’s, as of the fortunes of France, had been built by one artificer alone ? On Christmas Eve, 1800, if not before, such a conviction of insecurity must have been pressed home to

¹ *Mémoires de Constant*, t. i, p. 15.

Joséphine and to her daughter, as well as to the entire nation. When the destiny of a country is bound up with that of a single man, to count upon the future is to include in the reckoning the "hundred doors that lead to death." Napoleon was steadily advancing towards the height of his fame. The past summer had seen the short and brilliant Italian campaign, concluded by the battle of Marengo, and the establishment of the practical supremacy of France in Italy. All classes vied with each other in doing honour to the conqueror. "It seemed as if he was the sun of France." On Christmas Eve that sun came perilously near to setting.

Haydn's *Creation* was to be given, and the First Consul with his family and suite were to attend the performance. Joséphine, Caroline Murat, Hortense, were all to be present. The theatre was crowded with a brilliant audience; and the overture had begun when the First Consul entered his box, followed by his wife, his sister, and his stepdaughter, the last having a handkerchief bound round her hand.

She had been very near death that night. It was indeed only by an accidental delay in leaving the Tuileries that Joséphine, with the other occupants of her carriage, had been saved from destruction. An infernal machine had exploded just too late to accomplish its aim in killing Napoleon. He escaped uninjured. Had his wife's carriage been following his own closely, as it would naturally have done, it could not but have been destroyed. At the moment of starting, however, General Rapp, in attendance on

Joséphine, had pointed out that the colour of the shawl she wore was ill chosen, begging her to exchange it for another. She was at first inclined to defend her choice, telling the General gaily that he was as well fitted to attack a toilette as she to assail a redoubt ; and though in the end she deferred to his opinion, the slight delay that had been caused by the discussion availed to save her life.¹ Seven persons were killed, four times that number injured ; but though covered with broken glass from the shattered windows of the carriage, the three women within it were safe.

As the news of the First Consul's escape spread like wildfire through the theatre, the agitation was universal. Every one rose to their feet, women were sobbing, men scarcely less moved. Turning towards the consular box, the audience, wild with excitement, bestowed an ovation upon the popular hero ; and the curtain dropped upon an unrehearsed effect. Haydn's oratorio had no listeners that night.

Hortense's wound was nothing but a scratch. Yet it can hardly have failed to represent to an imaginative nature a possibility—one of those possibilities so easily and so gladly put out of sight. A few months earlier a Republican conspiracy had been directed against Bonaparte's life. On this occasion the criminals proved to be Royalists. Would the next attempt of the one party or the other be attended with success ? And if so, Napoleon gone, what then ? It was a question

¹ *Mémoires de Constant*, t. i. p. 89.



NAPOLEON BONAPARTE, FIRST CONSUL.

none could answer. For the present the blow had served no other purpose than to elicit the enthusiastic homage of the Parisian populace ; and the year about to begin was marked by success in everything to which the First Consul set his hand. One peace was to follow upon another, France to be everywhere triumphant.

It was to be the last of the happy years of Hortense's girlhood. The shadow of her doom was already darkening over her head ; but in ignorance of the future all, with her as with others, was mirth and merry-making. At Malmaison, where much time was spent, the improvements of the property were a never-failing source of interest to its new possessors. There also their friends could gather round them with greater freedom and intimacy than at the Tuileries, where it was not possible so much as to breathe the air at a window without becoming the object of public observation. The diversions were many and varied, dramatic entertainments being perhaps most in favour. Hortense's successes at Saint-Germain had made her eager to display her gifts before a larger audience ; a miniature stage was arranged, and theatrical representations given, the First Consul supervising the *répertoire* of plays and interesting himself in the performances. The ordinary company consisted of the Beauharnais brother and sister, Caroline Murat, and Bourrienne, with one or two other officers attached to the consular household. As a natural tribute no less to her talents than to her position, it

was Hortense to whom the leading rôles were most frequently assigned.

The *Barbier de Séville* was the first piece played, and it continued in favour with Napoleon, his step-daughter taking the part of Rosine. "Many years have passed since those joyous evenings," wrote the Duchesse d'Abrantès of these and later days, "but I still remember Mademoiselle de Beauharnais's charming and graceful figure, with that profusion of fair hair under a black velvet hat with long, rose-coloured feathers, her slender waist encircled by the black corset. I see her again, and I seem to hear her. And certainly it is a sweet and pleasant illusion."¹

Caroline Murat was, according to Bourrienne, but a mediocre performer. With a pretty face, lovely arms and hands, and a dazzling complexion, she is allowed by the Duchess, in spite of a disagreeable voice, to have passed muster—how indeed should a sister of the First Consul have failed to do so? But had Hortense, she adds, been no more than the wife of an aide-de-camp, she would still have won admiration.²

The pleasure taken by Napoleon in these private dramatic representations was real and genuine. He had given to each of the Malmaison company a bound collection of plays and, in his character of *protecteur né de la troupe*, had provided them with rich costumes. "Sometimes he even," says Bourrienne, "paid us compliments."

¹ *Mémoires de la Duchesse d'Abrantès*, t. iii. p. 388.

² *Ibid*

The secretary was one of the cleverest of the household performers, but, though admitting his liking for the form of amusement, he did not find it altogether an easy matter to combine the study of his parts with serious and onerous duties. "On more than one occasion I was compelled to point out [to the First Consul] that my occupations left me little time to learn my rôles. Thereupon he assumed his caressing manner and said, "*Allons !* let me alone. You have such a good memory. You know that it amuses me. You see how these *réunions* brighten and cheer Malmaison. Joséphine likes them very much. Rise earlier in the morning."

"I have so much sleep, have I not ?" answered the secretary ruefully. His post did not indeed admit of an undue amount of repose ; but Napoleon was not to be refused.

"Come, Bourrienne," he said, "do this for me. You all make me laugh so heartily. Do not rob me of that pleasure. I have not too many—you know it well." And Bourrienne, nothing loath, consented to return to the study of his parts.¹

Perhaps the secretary was aware—for he was often made the confidant of his master's wife—that Joséphine stood in greater need of cheering than her husband. The ever-present terror of a possible repudiation was pressing upon her more and more. If Bourrienne is to be credited, Lucien Bonaparte had urged upon his sister-in-law the necessity, in default of a legitimate

¹ *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. v, p. 14.

heir to his brother, of imposing some other upon the nation ; replying to her protest by expressions of compassion for her position, which, from one of his family, may well have failed to carry conviction.

“ *Eh bien !* ” he answered, “ what do you wish me to say to that, madame, except that I pity you greatly ? ” ¹

It was a veiled menace, related by Joséphine with tears. And playing her part well and gracefully, as mistress of her husband’s house, she must often enough have been sad at heart. Whatever may have been her fears or forebodings, the round of gaiety continued through the springtime and summer, as if there were no more serious business in contemplation. The King of Etruria and his wife were guests at Malmaison ; and at the great ball given by the Minister of War on the anniversary of Marengo, Hortense was the partner of the Royal visitor. But dramatic entertainments continued most in fashion, and at Neuilly, his country place, Lucien Bonaparte was emulating the performances at Malmaison. The play of *Alzire* had been produced there shortly before the scene with his sister-in-law already described, and the rival troupe had been invited to view the host in the part of Zamore. He was a good actor, keenly interested in the success of his theatre ; but on this occasion neither play, players, nor dresses commended themselves to his brother’s austerer taste, and the First Consul not only expressed his unvarnished opinion of the representation, but peremptorily

¹ *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. v. p. 11.

desired Lucien to abstain for the future from any such performance.

As the season advanced, Joséphine determined to seek again the little watering-place where Hortense had passed the summer, an emancipated schoolgirl. She was now, of course, to accompany her mother, and to Mademoiselle de Beauharnais—still, it will be observed, *friande*—is ascribed the account of the mishaps experienced on the journey, bearing the signatures of the five travellers—Joséphine, Madame de Lavallette, Hortense herself, the aide-de-camp Rapp, and Bonaparte *mère*—sent to Bourrienne for the benefit of those who had remained at home.

“In leaving Malmaison,” so it runs, “the party had tears in their eyes, giving them so severe a headache that the journey was truly overpowering to these charming persons. Madame Bonaparte *mère* bore the memorable day with most courage; Madame Bonaparte *consulesse* showed none at all; the two young ladies of the *dormeuse*, Mademoiselle Hortense and Madame Lavallette, had a contest over the flask of eau de Cologne. The amiable M. Rapp was forced to go to bed on arriving at Epernay; whilst the rest of the party strove to forget their woes in champagne. The second day proved more fortunate in the matter of health; but provisions were lacking. The hope of obtaining a good supper at Toul sustained them; but despair reached its height when, on Toul being reached, a bad inn and nothing to eat were found there. People were seen, with ludicrous expressions, making trial of a little

spinach dressed with lamp oil, and red asparagus stewed in sour milk. It was worth seeing the *gourmands* of Malmaison seated at a table so ill served.

“History records no day passed in torments so terrible as that on which we arrived at Plombières. Having left Toul in order to lunch at Nancy—no food eaten for two days—the civil and military authorities, coming to meet us, prevented the realisation of our project. We therefore continued our route, growing visibly thinner ; the *dormeuse*, to crown our misfortunes, having shown its intention of embarking upon the Moselle on its way to Metz, by means of a tumble which nearly befell it. We were compensated for so unfortunate a journey on our arrival at Plombières ; for we were received with rejoicings of all kinds. The illuminated town, the salutes of cannon, and the faces of the pretty women who were at every window, give us hopes of enduring with the fewer regrets our absence from Malmaison.

“This is the exact account of our journey, with the exception of certain anecdotes that we keep to relate upon our return, certified by the undersigned to be accurate.”¹

It will be seen that it was in the gayest spirits that Hortense revisited the mountain resort, nor were her expectations of amusement disappointed. At Luxeuil, close to Plombières, a ball was given in honour of the visitors, and it was Mademoiselle de Beauharnais by whom it was opened. But the weather was bad,

¹ *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. v. p. 10.

Napoleon at Paris—"Malmaison without thee," he writes to Joséphine, "is too *triste*"¹—and by the end of July all were once more gathered together in the home of his wife's predilection, the customary dramatic entertainments being varied by informal dances, usually taking place on Sundays, in which the First Consul sometimes deigned to join. And again Hortense was foremost in devising new features in the evening's diversion and in inventing original figures for the dance corresponding to the modern cotillon. Corridors and staircases were overrun by the revellers, and the chambers of the lazy and the somnolent, who preferred sleep to play, were not safe from intrusion.

Musical performances were also given, Garat and the harpist Alvimare² being prominent amongst the artists. Hortense, in spite of the manifold pastimes that filled her days, had not relinquished her musical studies, and, becoming her teacher, as he had been that of her mother, Alvimare gained so much influence over his pupil that, as a crowning tribute to his art, she consented to the sacrifice of her nails. It was not without a struggle. Hortense's hands were amongst her chief beauties, and to impair their perfection cost her much.

"I prefer the hand of Queen Hortense," said the Duchess d'Abrantès, comparing it afterwards with that of Caroline Murat, lovely, dimpled, and white ;

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i.

² Thus the name is often given, but the more correct form of it would seem to be Dalvimare.

“it is no less white, and then it is *comme il faut*. Translate the expression as you please—I will use no other, since this is the fitting one. Queen Hortense’s hand is the thinner, but her nails are admirably formed, arched and curved. The hand is long ; the fingers are adroit in their movements. It is plain that that hand handles the graving tool, the pencil, the lyre, and all that causes life to be many-sided. The other, one saw, was only made to strip the petals from the roses she once resembled.”¹

It required an effort on the part of the possessor to permit the nails belonging to such a hand to be reduced to the length prescribed by the preceptor.

“Cut my nails, monsieur !” she exclaimed at first. “Never shall I have the courage !”

But the master, continuing inexorable in his demands, at last prevailed. Rising to fetch the scissors, Hortense presented them to him ; and holding out her hands in melancholy silence, allowed him to work his will upon them.

Thus, in games by day—Napoleon sometimes vouchsafed to join in prisoner’s base, played in the grounds of Malmaison—in dancing and music by night, all went merrily ; whilst Hortense’s doom was drawing closer and closer.

¹ *Mémoires de la Duchesse d’Abrantès*, t. vi. p. 68.

CHAPTER V

1801

Marriage projects—Hortense's views—Her mother's designs—
Joséphine's fears of divorce—Louis Bonaparte's reluctance—
Lucien declines—Hortense's love affair with Duroc—Varying
accounts of it—Napoleon's conduct and opinions—Hortense's
engagement, and marriage.

WHILST most of her schoolmates and companions had found husbands, it may seem singular that Hortense, at eighteen, still remained *Mademoiselle de Beauharnais*; nor was it because the question of her marriage had not been often and anxiously debated. When she was still at *Saint-Germain*, and Bonaparte in Egypt, her mother would have liked to have arranged a match between her daughter and the son either of *Gohier* or *Rewbel*, both members of the Directory. Difficulties, however, had been made. Neither of the young men's families proved eager for the connection; and Hortense, for her part, was firm in her refusal to entertain either project. Her views on the subjects of love and marriage were, considering her nationality, unusually pronounced, and scarcely what might be expected from *Madame Campan's* favourite pupil. She indulged the conviction that, in order to be good and happy, a

woman must marry a man she passionately loved. Such sentiments not having been evoked by the young Gohier or Rewbel, she promptly decided against both one and the other, nor could she be moved from her determination. "Tu es une douce entêtée," Eugène is said to have told her. In the matter of marriage it would have been well had she shown greater obstinacy ; but for the present her will was strong enough to resist the proposed alliances.

After Bonaparte's return another was suggested. The suitor was in this case M. de Mun, who, as a returned *émigré*, might have seemed to have a better chance than his rivals of commending himself to a bride of Royalist sympathies. But another of the conditions Hortense had learnt to consider essential to a happy marriage was wanting. This was that she should be her husband's first-love. A report had unfortunately reached her ears that M. de Mun had cherished an attachment for Madame de Staël, regarded by Hortense as a "monstre bizarre" ; and on this score, as in the cases of Gohier and Rewbel, she was resolute in refusing to accept him.

It may be that another motive besides the one she alleged served to strengthen her resistance. There was a M. Aimé de Gontaut who had at this time won Mademoiselle de Beauharnais' approval. He was very young, had a face shaded, like her own, with thick, fair curls, possessed great blue eyes and gentle manners ; and Hortense had begun to entertain the hope that in this Prince Charming she might

have discovered the man whom she would be able to love after a fashion rendering marriage possible.¹ Madame Campan might preach wisdom, reminding her that sudden love is not always born in the heart for its happiness, that it is only solid when following upon friendship; but though her former pupil will have received the admonition with her accustomed docility, she was none the more disposed to frame her conduct upon prudential maxims. In this instance she was to be allowed no choice. The Gontaut family had to be reckoned with. M. Aimé was, in their eyes, too young for marriage; nor were they desirous that he should find a wife in the stepdaughter of the First Consul. The lover was forthwith sent to England, and Hortense's dream brought to an abrupt conclusion.

In the early autumn of 1800 it appears that, if not again in love, she was suspected of being so.² Writing to her in September, Madame Campan refers to a day she had passed at Malmaison, and to the reflections to which it had given rise. Hortense's position, she told her ex-pupil, was an embarrassing one. The duty of every reasonable girl was to avoid choosing her husband, retaining the right of rejection alone. Of this right, she urged, Hortense had already made full use. "I know that a philosophy I love, a liking for simplicity applauded by me and by all Paris, prevents you from putting a great value on your brilliant charms."

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Chastenay*, t. i, p. 118.

² It is possible that young de Gontaut was still in question.

But though it was well not to be dazzled, her position must be considered and respected. Hortense must be on her guard against the sentiment she had inspired, and must endeavour not to respond to it. "Read no novels ; above all, make none." Her stepfather was right when he had said, "All these young heads are persuaded that they are in love." Let Hortense do her duty by the First Consul, who cared for her as for a daughter. Let her venture to speak to him ; let her tell him that her heart was disengaged, and that her wish was to conform her will to his.¹

By the very next day a letter from Hortense had reassured her anxious teacher, and put her at ease. The girl's wisdom, she tells her, surpassed that of those who would be her guides, and had made it clear that she was still heartwhole.

Her daughter's disappointment with regard to Aimé de Gontaut or others, probably of no very serious nature, will have been regarded by Joséphine with equanimity, if not with satisfaction. Her desires and aspirations for Hortense's future had undergone a change since the days when she wished to bestow her upon a Gohier or a Rewbel, and although she had furthered M. de Mun's suit, her inclinations were increasingly in favour of the alternative of a Bonaparte alliance. Hortense, she was beginning to say—drawing a somewhat curious and invidious distinction—must marry either a Bonaparte or a gentleman. M. de Mun would have fulfilled the latter condition ; and she

¹ *Correspondance de Madame Campan*, t. i, pp. 97-9.

had been willing to accept him as son-in-law. But, with his dismissal, the desire to secure one of her husband's brothers as an ally, bound to support her interests against the hostility of the rest of the family, was gaining greater and greater force. Any one of the available Bonapartes would have served the turn of a woman dominated at the moment by self-interest ; and the thread of her design, ever more prominent, runs, a sinister line, through the years of her daughter's careless and joyous girlhood.

Though occasionally giving place to other schemes, the project was of old date. "There are those still living," wrote Louis Bonaparte, long after, to his unloved wife, "who can bear witness that our consent was never freely given, and that . . . we were both equally victims of an unjust and false policy. It is known that I loved your cousin Émilie long before my departure for Egypt, and for this reason, even at that time, rejected your mother's proposals for our union."¹ Abandoning the hope of carrying out her wishes, Joséphine had attempted, in Napoleon's absence, to secure friends in the Directory by means of a connection with some influential member. With the return of her husband, his supremacy in the State, and the accentuation of her own insecurity due to the scenes following upon his arrival, she had reverted to her former projects. Either Louis, returned in broken health from the East, or Lucien, when his wife's death rendered him a possible husband, or

¹ *L'Empire, les Bonaparte et la Cour* (J. Claretie), p. 32.

the *gamin*, Jérôme, would have served her turn. But no one of the brotherhood was willing to play into her hands, and even the fifteen-year-old Jérôme, though in no wise reluctant to amuse himself with his pretty *demi-sœur*, racing after her in the garden and joining in her games in the salon, had been sufficiently indoctrinated with the family politics to be aware that his heart must not be seriously affected by Hortense's fair hair and blue eyes.¹

Louis, for his part, had been firm in rejecting the fresh overtures made to him. "In 1799," wrote the ex-King of Holland in the letter quoted above, looking back over seventeen intervening years—"in 1799 I had again obstinately declined your hand." He had, moreover, to escape further importunity, obtained permission to go to Prussia, in the hope that on his return he might find Hortense married; and later on had succeeded in arranging that his regiment should be sent to Portugal. But Joséphine was singularly persistent. "Before leaving Paris, it was necessary that I should bid farewell to my brother and your *maman*. I went to Malmaison, where they were, and was detained there, in my own despite, for nearly a fortnight, . . . your *maman*, my brother, and even my sister, Caroline, pressing upon me this marriage, which I obstinately refused. In the end I left Malmaison by night, without permission, and rejoined my regiment at Bordeaux."² He had not, however,

¹ *Mémoires de la Duchesse d'Abrantès*, t. ii. p. 107.

² *Ibid.* pp. 32-7.

escaped. Months passed, he adds, continuing the recapitulation of his grievances, and his regiment was recalled to Paris. Before coming thither he wrote to his sister to inquire whether he could do so with safety ; and it was only on receiving the assurance that the two Generals, Moreau and Macdonald, had solicited Hortense's hand, and that to either one or the other it was to be given, that he ventured to return. " Nothing seemed to me then more impossible than our union. Nevertheless, a few months later I had married you."

Such is Louis Bonaparte's account of the series of endeavours made during those two years to persuade him to accept Hortense as a wife. Given to one who could have denied the facts, if false, there seems no reason for doubting its substantial truth, in spite of the assertion made by M. Masson to the effect that when he became betrothed to Hortense, Louis was *décidément amoureux*.¹ In his *Documents historiques sur la Hollande* Louis reiterates the assertions contained in his letter. According to the narrative there given of the events leading up to his marriage, upon his return to France in October Joséphine had reopened the subject, inviting him daily to her house. " Louis," he adds, speaking of himself in the third person, " Louis riait de ce projet dont l'exécution lui paraissait impossible." But one night at Malmaison, a ball being in progress, Joséphine took him apart, his brother followed, and after a prolonged conference, he was

¹ *Napoléon et sa famille* (F. Masson), t. i. p. 415.

induced to give his consent.¹ In the face of this second explicit statement made by one of those chiefly concerned, it is difficult to believe that he was other than an unwilling victim of his sister-in-law's policy and her husband's will.

Before Louis' consent had been wrested from him, Joséphine, temporarily relaxing her pursuit of the younger brother, seems to have turned her attention from time to time to the new-made widower, Lucien. After the death of his wife, in 1800—"l'immense et première douleur de ma vie"²—Lucien, according to his own account, had visited his sister-in-law, on his appointment as ambassador to Spain, to bid her farewell and take her orders for Madrid—orders resolving themselves into a request to obtain for her some of the fans for which the country was noted—his ignorance of which fact might be counted, observes Lucien airily, amongst his disqualifications for the post of ambassador of the French Republic.³ His sister-in-law, as well as her daughter, were upon this occasion, as usual, very gracious; and on his return to France Joséphine proceeded to make her desires plain. Visiting her one morning, he was detained to luncheon alone with her and Hortense, the motive of the invitation being considered by the guest transparent and his inferences confirmed by Hortense's blushes. "The plan," he adds, "if not disclosed to me without disguise, was

¹ *Documents historiques*, t. i. p. 114.

² Iung, *Mémoires de Lucien Bonaparte*, t. i. p. 381.

³ *Ibid.* t. i. p. 387.

indicated with sufficient clearness to admit of no doubt remaining in my mind ; though not so plainly but that I could reply to it with evasive courtesy." The two understood each other ; " Joséphine n'insista pas," and the entrance of the First Consul put an end to an embarrassing interview.¹

Of Hortense's attitude during her mother's persistent endeavours to force her upon a Bonaparte, we are left in ignorance. Lucien, undesirable as he would have been in some respects as a husband, may have had recommendations calculated to reconcile her to the prospect. In respect to Louis, if she cannot have been unaware of the pertinacity shown by Joséphine in his pursuit, she doubtless counted, with the confident optimism of eighteen, upon her own strength of resistance as sufficient to obviate any danger of entanglement in the net that was being spread. To be married against her will may well have seemed to the spoilt child a peril scarcely worth consideration, more especially at a moment when she was under the influence of a first love affair.

Hortense had forgotten to take into account the unconscious selfishness of a frightened woman. In proportion to the growth of her husband's power, Joséphine's fears were increasing in intensity. She had given him no heir to his greatness ; every member of his family was more or less her embittered enemy ; the bond uniting the two—that of a civil marriage contracted with no religious ceremony—was one of

¹ Iung, *Mémoires de Lucien Bonaparte*, t. ii. pp. 267-8.

which he was beginning to speak slightly ; and again and again the whisper of a divorce was heard. Terror of such a catastrophe haunted her. She stood alone. Amongst her friends she could count upon none possessing sufficient power and weight to avert the threatened calamity. Her sole defence was the love her husband bore her. If the passion she had inspired had been long extinct, it was replaced by a genuine affection and a half-contemptuous tenderness. He, too, was fortunate in his wife, he told his brother Lucien when offering his condolences to the widower—he hoped never to need the courage necessary to face a similar misfortune.¹ And again : “ Bourrienne,” he once said to his secretary, as the enthusiastic plaudits of the crowd met his ear, “ do you hear the sound of those acclamations ? It is as sweet to me as the voice of Joséphine ! ”² It was certain that he still loved her. But none knew better than his wife that to build upon his love might be to trust to a foundation of shifting sand ; and she longed to win over to her side some one of those bound to him by the indestructible ties of blood and kindred.

It was clear that before her end could be obtained a battle would have to be fought, and that, were Louis’ opposition overcome, disinclination upon Hortense’s part would still bar the way to success. In 1801 it was no secret that Napoleon’s stepdaughter had given her heart into the keeping of his aide-de-camp and general,

¹ Lucien, *Mémoires de Lucien Bonaparte*, t. i. p. 385.

² *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. iv. p. 311.

Duroc. She had not been careful to disguise the fact. A hostile biographer¹ has been at pains to demonstrate that it was from Hortense that the advances came, and that Duroc's subsequent conduct was excused and justified by the fact that she had been mainly responsible for the situation. There may be truth in the allegation. The man with whom she was in daily—almost hourly—intercourse may have been too well aware that she loved him. Wisdom, at eighteen, is not invariable, nor was prudence a feature of Hortense's character. But to lack it is not an unpardonable crime, and to give recklessly and with open hands, before making sure of an adequate return, if it be folly, is to err upon the side of generosity. Nor was she likely to have doubted that her affection was returned. Courted by both men and women, accustomed to flattery and admiration from all, it would not have readily occurred to her that the lover she had singled out for favour would prove indifferent to the gift she was prepared to bestow. And, taking for granted that Duroc's sentiments were such as she desired, she had no motive for concealment. Affection for the man whose wife she hoped to become would seem to her nothing to be ashamed of. "Severe in her own principles, or in imaginative sentiment"—an important distinction—"she was greatly surprised at moral lapses on the part of the women around her,

¹ Joseph Turquan. The animus with which M. Turquan's book is written throughout deprives it of the weight it might otherwise have possessed.

the more so when they were not caused by love.”¹ Love excused much. To love a man and to marry him was her dream ; but she was unfortunate in the hero she had selected for her romance.

“ I like Duroc,” Napoleon once said to Bourrienne ; “ . . . his character pleases me. He is cold, dry, severe ; and then Duroc never sheds tears.”

The secretary, in a footnote, warns the reader against too literal an acceptance of the ambiguous eulogy,² but the aide-de-camp’s conduct with regard to Hortense confirms his chief’s estimate. The First Consul would not have disliked a marriage between his stepdaughter and his general. Whilst Joséphine confided to Bourrienne her disinclination for the match, her husband expressed himself in quite another sense.

“ In spite of my wife,” he said, “ they are suited to one another, and they shall marry. I like Duroc. He is well born. I gave Caroline to Murat, Pauline to Leclerc ; I may well give Hortense to Duroc, who is a brave fellow. He is as good as the others, and already General. There is nothing against the match. Besides,” he added, with a keen appreciation of Joséphine’s projects, “ I have other views for Louis.”³

The situation was becoming strained. Joséphine obstinately adhered to her wishes ; Hortense shed tears when Louis Bonaparte was mentioned ;⁴ Napoleon, though not withholding his approval, observed a neutral

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i p. 155

² *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. iii. p. 111.

³ *Ibid.* t. iv. p. 359.

⁴ *Ibid.*

attitude. Had Hortense possessed the courage and spirit to make a personal appeal to her stepfather, and to acquaint him with her repugnance to the match proposed by her mother, the sequel might have been a different one. Napoleon was fond of the child he had seen grow up and had in a manner adopted ; and it is evident, if his remarks at St. Helena were correctly reported, that he had been left in the dark as to the true state of the case. “ Ils s’aimaient en s’épousant,” he is quoted as saying ; “ ils s’étaient voulu l’un l’autre.”¹ Nothing was further from the truth ; but it is not impossible that so far as his step-daughter was concerned, the Emperor spoke in good faith. Joséphine will have told her story without too scrupulous a regard to veracity, and whilst responding to Napoleon’s affection, a certain timidity had always kept Hortense at a distance from her mother’s husband. Constant and Bourrienne both mention that when she had a favour to solicit, she preferred to do it by deputy, causing her stepfather thereby amusement mingled with irritation. “ The little fool ! ” he would say. “ Why does she not ask me herself ? Is the child afraid of me ? ” No doubt she was ; and this fear, imposing silence upon her, may have been responsible for his conduct in connection with the marriage.

In the meantime, probably with the double purpose of bringing Duroc into notice and of removing him temporarily from Paris, he was sent as special envoy

¹ *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, p. 320.

to St. Petersburg, charged with the First Consul's congratulations to the Emperor Alexander on his accession, and the lovers were for a time separated. If Bourrienne is to be believed—and it must be borne in mind that Hortense's version of the story was a different one—the love affair had by this time reached so advanced a stage that a correspondence was kept up in which the secretary acted the part of intermediary. It was Hortense's habit to play billiards with him ; and when he told her in a low voice that he had a letter for her, the game ceased, and the girl ran to her room, to be followed thither by Bourrienne. "Her eyes would fill with tears, and it was not till a long time had elapsed that she would reappear in the salon."¹

Such was the position of affairs on the approach of winter 1801-2. The mission to St. Petersburg had been concluded, and on Duroc's return the success of his suit was so far taken for granted that Bourrienne offered him congratulations, somewhat coldly received. A few days later all was changed. Joséphine, the model of amiability, for whom "la bienveillance était un besoin," had carried her point and had succeeded in wrecking her daughter's hopes. With the pertinacity of a nature at once selfish and soft, when personal interests are at stake, she pressed her wishes importunately upon her husband, succeeding in convincing him that coercion would not be required to induce the two principally concerned to carry them out. "The marriage, for the rest," observed Napoleon, "was the

¹ *Mémoires de Sainte-Hélène*, p. 320.

result of the intrigues of Joséphine, who considered it for her advantage—*qui y trouvait son compte*.”¹ The result of the pressure she brought to bear was soon apparent. Bourrienne was at work in his study one evening when the First Consul entered.

“Where is Duroc?” he asked.

“Gone out,” was the reply. “I believe he is at the opera.”

“Tell him when he comes in,” ordered Napoleon, “that Hortense having been promised to him, he shall marry her. But it must be in two days at latest. I will give her 500,000 francs; and I nominate him Commander of the 8th Military Division. He will leave with his wife for Toulon the day after his marriage, and we shall live apart. I will have no son-in-law in my house. As I wish the matter to be settled at once, let me know to-night whether this will suit him.”

The offer, containing nominal advancement, was in effect an edict of banishment to a provincial post. Bourrienne—Napoleon still better—knew the man to whom it was made. The secretary expressed a doubt whether he would accept it.

“Very well,” answered his master, “then she shall marry Louis.”

“Will she do so?” asked Bourrienne dubiously.

“She must,” was the First Consul’s curt reply, giving rise in the mind of the listener to a shrewd suspicion that the step was the result of a domestic discussion,

¹ *Mémoires de Sainte-Hélène*, p. 320.

and that, weary of the struggle, Napoleon was determined to end it once for all.

At half-past ten Duroc had been acquainted with the First Consul's ultimatum. His decision was promptly taken. Since those were Napoleon's terms, he said, let him keep his daughter. And, giving no sign of emotion, he took his hat and went out to pay an evening visit. Hortense's fate was sealed.

It is hard to reconcile this version of the episode with that of Hortense, and to assign to each its proper degree of truth and accuracy would be difficult. If her assertion that her stepfather's secretary had given signs of a passion for her of which no trace appears in his memoirs is to be relied upon, his motive in accentuating her love for a rival is not apparent. Yet according to her account of the matter, he exaggerated what was a passing fancy into a serious love affair.

She had, on her own showing, liked Duroc; he desired to marry her, and she would have been not unwilling; but the correspondence of which Bourrienne had been the medium, as well as the cause of the lover's final withdrawal, was a fiction. She had left unopened the solitary letter he had addressed to her and hidden in the pages of a book, and upon the incident coming to the knowledge of her stepfather and Joséphine, it had been returned in that condition to the writer, the whole affair thus finding a natural end. Such was the story Hortense preferred to be believed. It is quite possible that the incident she describes took place—that unable, as she states, to decide either to read her

lover's letter or to destroy it, she left it in her room, that the fact came to Napoleon's ears, and that, charging her with receiving love-letters unknown to her parents, he reduced her to tears and submission.¹ But Hortense's statements must be read in conjunction with her avowal to Madame de Rémusat—made at a later date—that her grief on hearing of the arrangements for her marriage was due not only to the fact that she was to be bestowed upon a man she secretly mistrusted, but because she was also forbidden to think of the one she loved. The truth, as usual, probably lies between the two extremes. Married to a husband to whom she was attached, the remembrance of Duroc would not have troubled her much or long. But it will have added bitterness to her sorrow at becoming bound to a man she disliked.

The assertion that the marriage followed the betrothal with an interval of but a few days is one of the falsehoods often repeated.² In October the engagement was announced, and it was not until January 2 that Louis and Hortense became man and wife. Neither of the victims of Joséphine's diplomacy appear to have struggled further against their fate. Accepting the story of Duroc's withdrawal, Hortense's acquiescence is not difficult to explain. Her lover had demonstrated his indifference beyond possibility of doubt. The revelation, at eighteen, will have left her reckless. If her conduct was a case of moral suicide, none was at hand

¹ *Life of Napoleon III.* (Blanchard Jerrold), t. i. p. 30.

² Bourrienne is plainly at fault in his dates.

to tell her that one recovers from unhappiness, but not from death—or from marriage.

Louis' surrender is more difficult to understand. He had made an obstinate defence, and possibly over him, too, there had come that singular lassitude consequent upon a prolonged struggle. His reiterated affirmations have been quoted to prove that the union was forced upon him, and that, dominated by his brother's will, he was not a free agent. Lucien Bonaparte, on the other hand, has asserted that his own influence, supplemented by the blackest calumnies directed against the bride, had been exerted to induce the bridegroom-elect to refuse to play the part allotted to him, and that only on Louis' shamefaced confession that he was in love did he desist from his efforts.

“Tu es amoureux ! Eh bien, que diable viens-tu me demander des conseils ? Alors, oublie ce que je t'ai dit. Épouse, et que Dieu te bénisse !”¹

It has been seen that Napoleon at St. Helena likewise declared his conviction that it had been a love match ; and the assertion was corroborated by his brother Joseph. The explanation suggested by one biographer—namely, that the statements thus made by the Bonaparte brothers were designed to cast the responsibility of the unhappy sequel upon Hortense—does not appear sufficient. A more simple solution of the problem is perhaps supplied by the hypothesis that the attraction undoubtedly possessed by the bride

¹ Jung, *Mémoires de Lucien Bonaparte*, t. ii. p. 268.

proposed to him had so far taken effect upon Louis that he believed himself, for however brief a space of time, to be in love. It is impossible to do more than hazard a guess.

If the few details extant with regard to the three months' engagement are authentic, any evanescent affection on Louis' part would scarcely have survived them. Hortense, it would seem, made no attempt to conceal her feelings, hoping, it may be, against hope that her fellow-victim might in despair find a way of escape for both. A few weeks earlier Duroc had filled her horizon. Now Louis Bonaparte's figure blotted out the sun. If she had neither the courage to withdraw the consent wrung from her nor to face the situation with dignity, her youth must be remembered in her excuse. Her conduct was that of an unhappy and sullen child. When the unfortunate suitor visited the Tuileries that he might perform his part of the sorry farce by paying court to his promised wife, she would retreat into the embrasure of a window and meet his advances with tears; whilst on his persistence in an endeavour to set matters upon a more satisfactory footing, she would turn away and break into weeping.

It was a singular proof of the habit of morbid self-analysis characteristic of Louis that, during this period of betrothal, he made, as it were, a general confession in writing to his bride, "sending her a letter, twenty pages long, containing the whole history of his sentimental life, accompanied by circumstantial details

as to all the amatory emotions he had experienced.”¹ The proceeding is cited by M. Masson as convincing evidence of his being at the moment in love. It may be regarded rather as a conscientious endeavour to make his future wife fully aware of the state of his affections, in the vain hope of furnishing her with a motive for refusing to carry out the contract.

Meantime, Madame Campan was offering her warmest congratulations upon a union promising, in her opinion, unmixed contentment to both those concerned. To Louis she wrote that his marriage could not fail to be attended with the purest happiness, and that, her timidity once overcome, Hortense would find sweetness in loving, with all her heart, a husband whose qualities were so analogous to her own. Her felicitations to Hortense were made at more length.

“I had observed an estrangement between you and the Citizen Louis,” she wrote, “causing me to relinquish, with regret, an idea I had long cherished. . . . You reproached him with indulging a prejudice against women. The First Consul, who knows how to find a remedy for every ill, has, in his wisdom, chosen that which will prove a permanent cure to his brother. . . . You will be happy, my dear angel ; I predict it. . . . I also predict that you will love much and always, because sentiment when born of conviction is alone durable. . . . A marriage founded upon a suitability of position, of education, and of taste apparent to all the world, must prove the happiest of ties ; and love

¹ *Napoléon et sa famille* (F. Masson), t. i. p. 416.

when it comes latest is rooted far more firmly in the *ménage* than when it causes the engagement to be lightly undertaken in the first instance.”¹ Thus wrote Madame Campan, doing her best to set the matter in the most favourable light possible. If Hortense smiled as she read the letter, the terms in which it was couched may have served the purpose of demonstrating that there was no one to whom, in this hour of her need, she could turn for sympathy. She had ceased to struggle against destiny and her mother, and was submitting to be a simple asset in the Beauharnais reckoning.

Joséphine, for her part, may have succeeded to some extent in blinding herself to the fact that she was sacrificing her daughter to her personal interests. But there is a blindness that is criminal ; and her conduct at this juncture goes far to excuse the conclusions formed by the Duchesse d’Abrantès as to the degree of her affection for her child. “Mademoiselle Hortense de Beauharnais,” she says, “was loved by all around her. Her mother alone seemed not to recognise the charm and attraction of her daughter. I do not mean to say that she did not love her—God forbid that I should give utterance to a like thought ! Nevertheless, I have my recollections, and these recollections recall to me words, circumstances, facts, in short, not consistent, in my opinion, with a mother’s love such as Hortense de Beauharnais should have inspired.”² The judgment is harsh. No one, reading Joséphine’s

¹ *Correspondance de Madame Campan*, t. i. pp. 169-71.

² *Mémoires de la Duchesse d’Abrantès*, t. ii. p. 416.

letters to her daughter, or studying the relations existing between the two in after-years, can doubt that the love they bore one another was deep and true. But fear is selfish, and it may have seemed to Joséphine that, compared with the apprehensions continually haunting her mind, a girl's fancy was of small account. At any rate, she never swerved from her determination to carry out her purpose.

The time of betrothal passed heavily away. On January 4, the ceremony was performed by which Louis Bonaparte and his unwilling bride became man and wife. The contract, followed by the civil marriage, took place at the Tuileries. The formalities concluded, the wedding party proceeded at once, at one o'clock in the morning, to the house in the rue Chantereine, by this time re-christened the rue de la Victoire, where Joséphine's earlier married life had been passed, and where, in deference to the law still in force forbidding the performance of religious ceremonies in any but private dwelling-places, the blessing of the Church was pronounced by Cardinal Caprera upon the unhallowed union. "Never," said Louis, "was there a sadder ceremony, never did a couple feel a more vivid presentiment of all the horrors attending a forced and ill-assorted marriage."¹ "I remember," he afterwards wrote to his wife, "that during the benediction I tendered and you received the nuptial ring slowly, with effort, and trembling."²

¹ *Documents historiques sur la Hollande*, t. i. p. 114.

² Claretie, *L'Empire, les Bonaparte et la Cour*, p. 32.



From the original by R. Barl.

LOUIS BONAPARTE, KING OF HOLLAND.

Hortense, for her part, was weeping bitterly. She never looked at the bridegroom, and he was too proud and too deeply wounded to seek to move her from her attitude.¹ The rite was celebrated. In the eyes equally of the world and of the Church the knot was irrevocably tied.

A magnificent ball was given in honour of the occasion by Madame de Montesson, morganatic widow of the late Duc d'Orléans, who, under obligations to the First Consul, took advantage of the opportunity to manifest her gratitude. Belonging to the old order, her entertainment was signalised by a bold return to the customs of a past day. As guest after guest arrived, and was received by powdered footmen dressed in the familiar blue livery of France, they might have imagined the revolution to have been a dream. Once in the salon, the illusion was dispelled. The central figures of the pageant were eminently representative of the present—being, as they were, the brother and the stepdaughter of the man who had replaced the ancient Kings. Hortense, wearing a dress of white and rose-colour, embroidered in silver and covered with diamonds, stood, her husband beside her, receiving the congratulations of the crowd; she was white as death, and it was observed that, as at the marriage ceremony, the eyes of the newly wedded couple sedulously shunned a meeting.

One wonders whether, now that it was too late, conscience awoke and stirred uneasily within Joséphine

¹ *Memoires de Constant*, t. i. p. 117.

as she looked at the pale bride? whether a suspicion of the true state of the case—supposing him to have been hitherto the dupe of his wife's misrepresentations—flashed upon the shrewd intelligence of the First Consul? He had been fond of his young brother; he had shown for Hortense at all times the affection of a father. It is almost incredible that, as he watched them, a misgiving should not have made itself felt. But the thing was done, and he was not a man to indulge in vain and futile regrets. Louis Bonaparte and Hortense de Beauharnais were man and wife.

CHAPTER VI

1802

Louis Bonaparte—His character—Early married days—Unhappiness
- Reasons for it—Attacks upon Hortense's reputation—A fête at
Saint-Germain—The Concordat—Clerical adulation—Hortense at
Malmaison—Duroc and his marriage—Birth of Napoleon Charles.

IF the tragedy of the situation produced by Joséphine's intrigues and her husband's will is to be fully grasped, a comprehension of the man to whom Hortense was bound will be necessary. Those making it their business to vindicate her from blame with regard to the unhappy consequences of the union have naturally been led to paint the portrait of her husband in unfavourable colours. Nor can it be denied that, especially as time went on, and his nature became soured and embittered by suffering, physical and mental, he was a man ill to live with. But none will refuse him his merits. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he was not devoid of a strong sense of religion. Madame de Rémusat, it is true, declared his opinions to be based rather upon speculative theories than upon any more solid foundation, quoting his brother's complaint that Louis' pretended virtues gave him as much trouble as Lucien's vices. It must, however, be remembered that, since the sense of duty of the future King of Holland

was fated to clash with Napoleon's will, it was not unnatural that his brother's autocratic temper should refuse to recognise in his resistance a case of conscience ; and when the lady-in-waiting charges him with the display of a certain hypocrisy of goodness, she brings an accusation hard to substantiate. Hypocrisy—the deliberate intention of misleading by an assumed uprightness—is not so common a fault as it is sometimes considered ; nor is it likely that a man of Louis' temperament, melancholy, reserved, and bitter, should have put himself to the pains of imposing upon the world. In many quarters a respect was felt for him not accorded to others of his family, and Metternich expressly states that “l'injustice seule eût trouvé à reprendre à son caractère moral.”¹

To his merits must be added that of personal courage, a courage of the rarer kind owing nothing to enthusiasm. Though serving his apprenticeship as a soldier well and bravely, his visions had not, like those of his great brother, been concerned with glory or ambition ; he had no liking for a military life, and had almost a woman's horror of the accompaniments of war. Nevertheless, when, as a lad of sixteen, he was for the first time under fire, Napoleon noticed with pride the absence on his part of any sign of fear ; and on another occasion, when the two stood side by side exposed to the balls of the enemy, the elder brother observed that, whilst others bent their heads, Louis, like himself, faced them erect and motionless.

¹ *Mémoires de Metternich*, t. i. p. 311.

"I have heard you say," answered the boy, in reply to his question, "that an artillery officer should not fear cannon. It is our weapon."¹

Yet, two years later, the spectacle of the sack of Pavia rendered him silent and mournful for the rest of the campaign; and though he performed his duty with coolness and gallantry, he disliked it. As early as eighteen his health had suffered, partly from premature exertion, partly from other causes; and after the Egyptian expedition the seeds of disease had already developed to a degree rendering him scarcely recognisable to those who had known him, "parfaitement bon et doux,"² in his boyhood. As time went on his temper became increasingly soured, and his spirits were overshadowed by an egoistic and mistrustful gloom. Whilst claiming, in an autobiographical passage,³ to have preserved until his marriage "the naïveté and good faith belonging to childhood," he owns that adverse circumstances, with grief, had afterwards left upon him a lifelong imprint of sadness and discouragement, and to the melancholy he confesses others gave a harsher name. Had he been permitted to realise the dream he had cherished of a happy domestic life, there might have been a chance that the effects of pain and disease would have been dispelled or neutralised. "You know," he wrote long afterwards to his sister, reminding her of his reluctance to

¹ *Les Rois Frères de Napoléon I.* (du Casse), p. 88.

² *Mémoires de la Duchesse d'Abrantès*, t. ii. pp. 42, 66.

³ *Documents historiques sur la Hollande*, t. i. pp. 114-5.

enter upon a union with Hortense—"you know how, in order to be left in peace, I simulated a repugnance to marriage; whereas it had ever been the object of my desires."¹ In a congenial atmosphere the promise of his youth might have found fulfilment. Compelled to become the husband of a woman for whom he felt no affection, and receiving scanty encouragement from his companion in misfortune to hope that she would join with him in an endeavour to retrieve, so far as was possible, the lost chances of life, he threw up the game. Sad and disillusioned, he shut, so to speak, his doors upon himself, and—most fatal mistake in man or woman—acquiesced in being unhappy. Indulging the tastes of a scholar and a student, he retired more and more into an inner circle to which few were admitted, and where, secluded from outward influences, the sane sense of proportion was lost, trifles became of importance, and suspicion and mistrust generated a species of petty tyranny well calculated to prove fatal to any possibility of domestic concord.

The most deplorable feature of the case is perhaps the fact that the wretchedness endured by husband and wife had not its origin, in the first instance, in anything more culpable than sheer incompatibility of temper and disposition. In recording his refusal to entertain Joséphine's offer of her daughter's hand, made some eighteen months before his consent was finally obtained, Louis explicitly states that it was not based upon any reason unfavourable to the

¹ *L'Empire, les Bonaparte et la Cour* (J. Claretie), p. 31.

character of the bride proposed to him, since all the world united to speak well of her, but was dictated solely by the fear that their two natures would not agree.¹ His apprehensions were lamentably justified.

Much at first sight might have seemed to promise otherwise. Louis was not destitute of qualities calculated to recommend him to many women; and Hortense, with her charm, her many gifts, and her capacity for devoted affection, wedded to a man she loved, might have been the centre of an ideal home. But forced together by circumstances, each constituted the other's misery. Husband and wife alike had reached a stage of moral development rendering them specially unfitted to cope with their misfortune. Both probably dissociated to a large extent abstract principles from the practical conduct of life. If Louis believed in God, in man or woman his faith was small²; and measuring actualities by the imaginative standard of eighteen, Hortense would be hard to satisfy. Had the ill-starred couple attained a higher level, they might have risen above their disaster, and pitiful each to each, overtaken in a common shipwreck, the raft of duty might have brought them safe to land. Had they, on the other hand, cherished lower ideals, they might have learnt to be content with less, and their bondage might have proved less unendurable. But young and impatient, they knew nothing of compromise, nor of the necessity, if life is not to be resolved into one long

¹ *Documents historiques sur la Hollande*, t. i. p. 109.

² See J. Turquan's *La Reine Hortense*.

struggle, of resignation to the inevitable. The result was deplorable.

Not more than six days after the disastrous January night when Hortense and her future had been committed to Louis Bonaparte's care, Napoleon had started for Lyons, where a constitution was to be given to the Cisalpine Republic. He had been accompanied by Joséphine, so that during her first few weeks of married life, separation from her mother enhanced Hortense's sense of loneliness. According to a local tradition, the bride and bridegroom left Paris on the day following their wedding for Baillon, a small property acquired by Louis a year earlier, "the most profound and hidden retreat to be found within ten leagues of Paris."¹ If it was at this place, buried in forest-land, unapproached by any highway, and a league from the nearest village, that Hortense's first days of marriage were passed, it was a strange and dreary beginning to her new life. Surrounded by the river Thève, the house was virtually an island, "un lieu de mystère, un coin où nul ne se hasarde, un refuge d'exil ou de grand désespoir."² To Louis its unbroken solitude was one of its recommendations; to Hortense, a lonely child, shrinking from the prospect of the future stretching drearily before her, the effect may easily have been analogous to that of a nightmare. Water and woods, woods and water, were the sole objects meeting her eyes; her only companion her unloved husband.

¹ *Napoléon et sa famille* (Masson), t. i. p. 396.

² *Ibid.* t. i. p. 367.

Their stay at Baillon can have lasted for no more than a few days. Louis must have recognised the fact that it would be unwise to prolong it; and they returned quickly to the house in the rue de la Victoire, once Joséphine's home, and now made over to the newly married couple. For a month they remained under the same roof. That term, short as it was, fully sufficed to demonstrate how unbearable life together would be found. "What tears," wrote Louis afterwards, "what lamentations, marked that time! And all the days that we have since been constrained to live together!"¹ The fact recognised by those chiefly concerned with so little loss of time, must soon have been patent to all the world. "Louis can have been on good terms with his wife for very few months," admitted Napoleon afterwards, looking back across the intervening years. "Much exactingness upon his part, much *légèreté* on that of Hortense—these were the reciprocal wrongs." Good, generous, and devoted as she was, and in spite of his affection for her and of the attachment he knew her to feel for himself, her stepfather was constrained to acknowledge that she had not been blameless towards his brother. However insupportable Louis might have proved as a husband, it was Napoleon's conviction that he had at one time loved his wife²; and where interests so great were involved, a woman should be mistress of herself, and have the *adresse* to love in return. Such was the

¹ *L'Empire, les Bonaparte et la Cour* (J. Claretie), p. 32.

² Hortense is said to have corroborated this assertion.

Emperor's conclusion, at leisure in his place of exile to review the past dispassionately.¹

At the time, however, those who had advocated, or who, like Napoleon, were responsible for the experiment, would be in no haste to pronounce it a failure ; and Madame Campan in especial, kind, solicitous, and affectionate, was continuing to make rose-coloured forecasts of the future. In a letter to her old pupil she painted a radiant picture of the domestic bliss awaiting her. Allowing that the bride might still be a little bewildered by her new circumstances, she assured her that she would soon know nothing but the happiness of possessing a second self, a confidant of all her thoughts, fears, wishes, hopes. Between man and wife no silence need be observed. Their interests were common ; their happiness indivisible ; and self-sacrifice was a joy.² It may be that Louis was afforded an opportunity of perusing Madame Campan's sanguine prophecies, and that he argued well from them of her fitness to instruct his wife in other than scholastic matters ; since it appears that not a week after the marriage he invited the schoolmistress to name a day for dining in the rue de la Victoire.

Whatever might be the case with Madame Campan, it is possible that Joséphine, in the midst of the enthusiastic reception accorded by Lyons to the First Consul and his wife, was not altogether untroubled by misgivings as to the daughter left behind

¹ *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, t. iii, p. 320.

² *Correspondance de Madame Campan*, t. i.

at Paris. Though probably persuaded that nothing but time was necessary to reconcile Hortense to her fate, she was evidently impatient to prove to her own satisfaction that all was going well.

“At last,” she wrote on January 24, “I see with pleasure the approach of the time when I shall have my dear daughter in my arms. In seeing you I shall forget the sadness that I have felt in this place. . . . I shall tell you of all that has happened during our stay at Lyons, and shall talk to you of the *fêtes* and amusements prepared for us. But no pleasures exist for your mother unshared by you. Embrace your husband for me,” Joséphine adds; “tell him that I am beginning to love him *à la folie*; that I thank him for his little letters, and that they are very kind. . . . Bonaparte embraces you, and your mother loves you tenderly.”¹

It is clear that Louis had not as yet abandoned the attempt to establish friendly relations with his wife’s family. He has been charged with acting from motives of policy and with dissimulation in not at once declaring war with Joséphine.² But although in no long time he made his dislike and distrust of her plain, it is not impossible that, at first, he was honestly endeavouring to overcome the sentiments with which she inspired him, and to establish a state of things conducive to peace, if not to happiness. Hortense would seem to have been guiltless of any

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. ii.

² See *Madame Louis Bonaparte* (d’Aijuzon), p. 12.

similar attempt to keep up appearances. "All who approached you," said Louis bitterly, in the letter quoted above, "and one may say the greater part of Paris, know that we had suffered compulsion." Of her methods of making it apparent a description supplied by Napoleon's valet, Constant, though applying to a somewhat later period, may be taken as an example.

"I have seen Madame Louis Bonaparte a hundred times," wrote this witness, "seek the solitude of her apartment, with a friend, in order to shed her tears. . . . They escaped her even in the First Consul's salon ; when this young woman, who, brilliant and gay, had so often done the honours there, and turned etiquette into derision, was observed with regret to retire into a corner or into a window with some intimate friend, that she might confide her troubles to her. During such an interview—from which she emerged with her eyes wet and reddened—her husband would remain pensive and taciturn at the other end of the salon."¹ This condition of affairs may well have been found intolerable by any man possessing a remnant of pride and self-respect, however determined he might be to accept the inevitable ; and if Louis' recollections, recorded fourteen years later, are to be trusted, not more than a month had passed when he took the step of relieving his wife temporarily of his presence, going first to Baillon, afterwards to Barèges for the benefit of his health, and only returning to Paris upon the birth of his child in October.

¹ *Mémoires de Constant*, t. i. p. 118.

Thus he summarises the history of the first year of marriage. Accepting his account as approximately accurate in the matter of dates, it must have been to a subsequent period that Hortense referred when relating, in her turn, to Madame de Rémusat the story of her early wedded life. If part of her friend's account is avowedly quoted from Madame Louis, part was probably the result of personal observation when, two years later, her position at Court afforded her opportunities of forming conclusions of her own, nor must her bias in Hortense's favour be forgotten. But the state of things she describes was the natural and logical development of the terms established from the first.

Hortense, the *dame du palais* asserts, had told her of her grief when she had been forbidden to think of the man she loved, and was to be bestowed upon another. The arrangement, however, suiting her mother, and being such as to strengthen family ties and further her brother's interests, she had surrendered her will to that of others, and had acquiesced in it. The sacrifice accomplished, her imagination—always a powerful influence with Hortense—had exaggerated the duties imposed upon her by marriage, and though too sincere to simulate sentiments she did not feel, she had been perfectly gentle and submissive, full of deference, and perhaps more solicitous to please her husband than if she had loved him.¹

The account is, it must be repeated, that of a

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Remusat*, t. i. p. 157.

partisan ; yet there is nothing antecedently improbable in the picture. Hortense was eighteen. Highly strung and cherishing fanciful ideals of duty and conduct, she may, when not giving way to the overt misery indicated by Louis' reproaches, have assumed the attitude of self-sacrifice and abnegation painted by her friend. The misfortune was that, misled by youth and possibly by dramatic instinct, she over-acted her part, and the *rôle* she assumed of *victime soumise* can have been in no wise soothing to the irritable temper and sensitive nerves of a man fully as much injured in his own eyes as his wife. From justifiable exasperation he proceeded, less excusably, to unfounded suspicions. Embracing the hypothesis that, in the fitful attempts hazarded by Hortense at conciliation, she was acting in accordance with suggestions from her mother, he saw in them nothing but an intention to deceive. "Elle s'exerce sur moi d'abord," he said, "pour me tromper."¹ Viewed in this light, her line of conduct, "pursued with an exaggeration of virtue and an eagerness of self-sacrifice unmoderated by prudence,"² roused in the man it was intended to soften nothing but distrust. He repelled her attentions and treated her on more than one occasion with harshness and contempt.³ Worse was to follow. Hortense loved her mother, nor can there be any doubt, in spite of Madame Junot's insinuations to the contrary, that Joséphine

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 157.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

was deeply attached to her child ; it is therefore likely that neither ever forgave the fact that, in what it is permitted to believe was an ungovernable access of ill-temper, Louis not only revealed to his wife the injurious reports that had been circulated with regard to his sister-in-law, but expressed his desire that all confidence between Joséphine and Hortense should be at an end for the future.

“ You are now a Bonaparte,” he said ; “ our interests should be yours. You have nothing further to do with those of your family.” For his own part, he added, he should take precautions to protect himself against the common fate of husbands, and would be the dupe neither of attempts to evade his measures nor of any feigned gentleness.¹

A scene such as this, whatever excuses may be found for Louis, would not conduce to harmony between the ill-assorted couple. In extenuation of the apparent brutality he displayed, it should be remembered that he was twenty-four, with little more experience of life than his wife ; that his whole family, with the exception of its head, were Hortense’s envenomed foes ; that his mother had regretted his marriage ; Lucien had warned him against it, accompanying his counsels with slanders which, even disbelieved, will have sunk deep into his heart ; and that Madame Murat, his young sister, was losing no opportunity of fanning any suspicions he might entertain. Besides all this, there was a disaccord

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat.*

between the natures of husband and wife making a true understanding between the two impossible. When, years after, Hortense pronounced sentence upon the marriage that had proved so unblessed, it was in terms the more conclusive because they were both dispassionate and just. "My husband is a good man," she said; "and if our characters have never been sympathetic, it is because we have failings that cannot be reconciled. I have over-much pride. I was spoilt when I was young. I thought perhaps too much of myself; and how is it possible, with a like disposition, to live with one who is distrustful?"

So she spoke, rendering tardy justice to the man from whom she had parted. But years had to elapse and bitter experiences to be endured before that standpoint of impartiality could be reached.

Thus the disastrous union between Louis Bonaparte and Hortense de Beauharnais was inaugurated. During the spring and summer of 1802 Hortense was granted one source of satisfaction. In October her baby was to be born, and the prospect of becoming a mother, to a woman whose most passionate love was hereafter to be lavished upon her children, will have gone far to reconcile her to her fate. To others beside herself the expected event was of importance. Neither Joseph nor Lucien Bonaparte possessed a son; Joséphine's chances of providing her husband with an heir were scarcely worth taking into account; and the advent of a child of Beauharnais descent who might be

regarded in the light of a successor to Napoleon was appreciably adding to the jealousy felt by the Bonaparte clan. Even to Joséphine the fact that to her daughter's son might be allotted the place belonging by right to her own may have been a source of sadness, and it is said that the anticipation of the birth of her first grandchild failed to rouse in her the interest demanded by the occasion.¹ Another cause may have contributed to poison her pleasure in the prospect. Ignorant though Hortense remained of the fact till years afterwards, slanderous tongues were busily concerning themselves with her at this period, and it is necessary briefly to refer to a report prevalent in France as well as in foreign countries. The earliest of the calumnies directed against her character, it is also the easiest of refutation, and would be scarcely worthy of notice, had it not been for the importance attached to the slander at the time, and, still more, for the use to which it would appear that Napoleon was prepared to turn it.

It was asserted that the relations of Hortense de Beauharnais with her mother's husband had been other than those of stepfather and daughter. By the enemies of the First Consul, eager to believe and to circulate any scandal tending to discredit in the eyes of the world a man they hated and feared, the rumour was gladly welcomed ; whilst members of his family were ready to make capital out of the charge, and to use it as a weapon against the dreaded Beauharnais influence.

¹ *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. v. p. 21

Lucien implies that it was this argument he employed to dissuade his brother from the marriage¹; and Caroline Murat, always bitterly jealous of Hortense, was not ashamed to attempt, by means of it, to separate Louis from his wife.²

The slander has been admitted by Hortense's most hostile critics to be unsupported by a shred of evidence.³ Bourrienne, who does not spare his master, emphatically denies it.⁴ Constant, who, as Napoleon's personal attendant, was cognisant of any intrigue he carried on, is equally decided.⁵ Madame de Rémusat mentions the rumour with indignation and contempt, stating that Hortense had ever commanded her stepfather's respect no less than his affection. "With little esteem for women, he always professed veneration for Hortense, and the fashion in which he spoke of her and acted towards her gives the lie very explicitly to the accusations directed against her. His language in her presence was always more measured and decent. He would often make her a judge between himself and his wife, and accepted lessons from her to which he would not have listened patiently from another. 'Hortense,' he would sometimes say, 'forces me to believe in virtue.'"⁶

The calumny has died a natural death. As having

¹ Iung, *Mémoires de Lucien Bonaparte*, t. ii. p. 268.

² *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 159.

³ See *La Reine Hortense* (J. Turquan), p. 55.

⁴ *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. iv. p. 322.

⁵ *Mémoires de Constant*, t. i. p. 113.

⁶ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 160.

any bearing upon Hortense's character, it might be wholly disregarded. But as a factor in the making of history and in its influence upon her domestic affairs, it cannot be equally lightly dismissed. Napoleon did his best to put an end to the reports that had gained so wide a circulation. By obliging his stepdaughter, against her will and in total ignorance of his motives, to appear at a ball given at Malmaison two months before her child was born, he exerted himself to disprove a lying assertion of some English newspaper to the effect that the birth had already taken place. But recognising his inability to kill the slander, he was not above contemplating the possibility that it might prove of use. In the rumours so persistently current in France he perceived a desire, flattering to his self-love, on the part of the nation that he might, at all costs, have an heir of his own blood¹; and when discussing with Hortense, five years later, the consequences of the death of her eldest child, he was strangely candid. Revealing for the first time to his stepdaughter the nature of the blow which had been aimed at her reputation, "You know," he added, "the absolute absurdity of such a suspicion; but I assure you that at one time all Europe believed him to be my son. No one," he went on, after pausing a moment at her movement of astonishment—"no one thought the worse of you. The world has always respected you. But the slander was believed. I thought," he added, after a second pause, "that this

¹ *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. v. p. 21

belief might be turned to good account, and the death of the child was a great misfortune."

"I was so much startled," said Hortense, relating what had passed, "that I stood by the side of the fireplace, incapable of uttering a word—I heard nothing more that he said." Had, then, all his affection, she asked herself, in the bitterness of that moment, been nothing but policy? ¹

It may have been a natural question. It was an unjust one. Despite the shock occasioned to her by the perception of the fact that he was alive to the advantages to be reaped from an unavoidable slur upon her good name, Napoleon's attachment to his step-daughter was from first to last true and real; and his gradual recognition of the unhappiness to which she had been doomed must have been attended with no little pain.

For the present she was relieved from the necessity of daily intercourse with her husband. Relinquishing the thankless task of endeavouring to propitiate his bride, Louis was dividing his time between attention to regimental duties and an attempt, by means of the use of medicinal waters, to cure the affection of his hand which, at first attributed to rheumatism, was to develop into paralysis. Hortense, freed from his presence, reverted in great measure to her former manner of life. Whether or not her husband had already made the grave mistake of expressing his

¹ *Napoléon et les femmes* (F. Masson). M. Masson does not give his authority for the scene he describes.

unvarnished opinion of the mother she loved, it is clear that his prohibition of freedom of communication had not yet been enforced, for Hortense is found taking her share in the amusements going forward at Malmaison or in Paris much as she had done in the days of her girlhood. An occasional visit was also paid to her old haunts at Saint-Germain, where she assisted in March at a grand performance of *Esther*, given by Madame Campan's pupils ; when the First Consul, his family, and his retinue formed part of the brilliant audience assembled to grace the occasion ; and the Prince of Orange, likewise amongst the spectators, provided an unexpected interlude in the proceedings.

Banished from his native land, he had repaired to France to solicit Napoleon's aid against the rebel States, and, possibly catching the infection of the dramatic atmosphere around him, introduced an improvised scene into the performance of Madame Campan's company. The young Hebrew captives were carrying on a dialogue when the interruption occurred.

"J'irai pleurer au tombeau de mes pères," sang one of the *pensionnaires*, when a sound of loud sobbing became audible. The actresses paused ; the audience directed their glances towards the spot whence it proceeded ; and the First Consul had turned to his hostess to demand an explanation, before it was perceived that the royal guest had been overcome by emotion. The Prince was young and good-looking, and for the purpose of enlisting feminine sympathy the incident

was not ill arranged. But Napoleon was made of sterner stuff, and declined to be moved by the exile's tears.

"Alors," he observed coolly, when Madame Campan had made him acquainted with the state of affairs—"alors, ce n'est pas le cas de se retourner"; and the Prince must have been sensible that his exhibition of feeling had failed in its object.¹

On Easter Day of this year two great events took place. The Treaty of Amiens was signed, and the Concordat was promulgated. Peace was proclaimed with God and man. Catholic Christianity was once more declared to be the national religion; the altars were again raised in the desecrated churches; and a great Te Deum in Notre Dame celebrated the event. Before the First Consul, the State functionaries, and an immense concourse of people, a cardinal said Mass, six archbishops and nineteen bishops taking part in the ceremony. Church and State were formally united.

The ceremony may be regarded from many points of view. No doubt it is well that a nation, or the head of a nation in its name, should make public confession of faith. And behind the pageant, underneath the show, who can say how great a body of conviction lay? Reaction against the anti-Christian maxims of the revolution had set in, and to many the return to the ancient observances will have been a source of sincere rejoicing. The poor, the sad, and those towards whom this present world has been chary of its gifts, can ill dispense with the hope of

¹ *Madame Louis Bonaparte* (d'Arjuzon), p. 25.

another. But studying the records of the times, turning over the pages of the multitudinous memoirs it was the fashion to write, the insignificant part played by religion of any kind in the cultured life of the day is apparent. There is no question of conflicting creeds, of the strife of partisans ; it is rather that as a motive power it scarcely seems to exist. And such being the impression conveyed by the intimate self-revelation of the educated men and women of the period, it is impossible to avoid the inquiry whether the interest displayed by them in the great ceremonial reconciliation of Church and State was not primarily due to their recognition of a political and social necessity.

One of Hortense's biographers has painted a fancy picture of her sentiments on that Easter Day—of the emotions necessarily roused in a French and Catholic soul, a nature so much in love with greatness and heroism, by the spectacle of her stepfather's entry into the ancient basilica, the scene alike of revolutionary orgies and royal pomp, of which he had rebuilt the altars.¹ The picture is purely imaginary. At Hortense's feelings on the occasion it is only possible to guess ; of the light in which the restoration of religion was regarded by Napoleon we are not left in uncertainty.

"J'ai besoin du Pape," he told Bourrienne with cynical candour in reference to Lafayette's protest against the Concordat. "Lafayette may be right in theory ; but what is a theory ? A folly, when it is

¹ *Madame Louis Bonaparte* (d'Arjuzon).

to be applied to a mass of men. . . . I have need of the Pope ; he will do what I want.”¹

The Pope did it ; and the voice of the clergy mingled with that of lay France in fulsome adulation of the national idol. When, later on, Bonaparte desired that prayers should be offered for the success of the French arms, his request was the signal for an outburst of enthusiasm as exaggerated as it is repulsive. “Let us above all ask of God,” wrote the Archbishop of Rouen, “that the man of His right hand, that man who under His direction has done so much for the re-establishment of His worship, who intends to do still more, should continue to be, like Cyrus, the Christ of Providence.” “Religion,” said a country curé to the First Consul, during his visit to the northern provinces—“Religion, like France, owes to you all that she is ; we owe to you all that we are ; I owe to you all that I am.”² It is needless to multiply quotations. Napoleon may well have felt that as a stroke of policy the restoration of the altars of the Church had been attended with success.

By the middle of June Hortense was installed at Malmaison, where she was acting as mistress of the house in the absence of her mother, once more taking the waters at Plombières. It was with a heavy heart that Joséphine had pursued her way to the watering-place, and Napoleon did his best to console her by his letters. “We are a little *triste* here,” he wrote,

¹ *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. v., p. 32.

² *Ibid.* t. v., pp. 122-3.

"although the charming daughter does the honours of the house wonderfully well." And then, best comfort of all to Joséphine's sad and anxious heart, "I love you as I loved you the first day ; since, more than all others, you are good and charming."

It was not true ; a chasm divided the hot passion of the early weeks of marriage from the quiet affection of the present time. But the assurance of continued attachment will have done something to quiet the haunting fears always so ready to lift their heads, and more apt than usual in solitude and absence to keep the sufferer company.

"I am unhappy," she wrote to Hortense ; "I am separated from you, and my heart is as sick as my body. I feel that I was not born, my child, for so much grandeur, and that I should be happier in a retreat surrounded by the objects of my affection. I know you, my dear daughter, and I am sure that, in making the happiness of my life, you also share all my anxieties. . . . I know your attachment to Bonaparte well enough to be persuaded that you will keep him faithful company. For many reasons you owe him affection and gratitude."¹

Bonaparte continued to report what was going on at Malmaison in his wife's absence. Hortense was pretty well. Joséphine's big son—Eugène—had been ill, but was better ; the weather was fine, and a performance of the *Barbier de Séville* was to take place, in which, as he mentions in a later letter, Hortense

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. ii. pp. 222-3.

played the part of Rosine with her customary intelligence.¹

Hortense had had more serious matters than dramatic performances to occupy her during the summer. Demands had been made upon her to which it must have been difficult to respond. It was one thing, at Madame Campan's request, to exert herself to further a match between her niece, Eglé Auguié, and General Ney, and her efforts had evidently been successful. "You are the author of the marriage," wrote the grateful aunt in June. To be asked to intervene after the same fashion, when it was a question of a union between Duroc, her own lover of not a year ago, and another pupil of Madame Campan's, was a different matter. Yet the schoolmistress did not hesitate to invite her to act as mediatrix in this case also. The proposed bride was a child of fourteen, Nievès Hervas de Almenara, whose father, in spite of his high-sounding name, was a rich Spanish banker. Little Nievès being his only daughter and heiress, the misfortune, observed Madame Campan, was that her other recommendations—as usual the teacher had nothing but good to say of her charge—were always passed over in view of her riches. Doubtless in consideration of her wealth, Duroc had been a suitor for the hand of a bride who, according to Constant, a less partial judge than Madame Campan, had little else to recommend her. It is clear that the General had not proved an eager lover; and it must have struck

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i. pp. 116, 120.

Hortense as a singular request when her old governess invited her intervention to spur him on to greater keenness in pursuit of the heiress. For this was what she was asked to do.

"My little Nievès is at her father's," wrote Madame Campan in June. "I hope General Duroc will go to see her to-day. Try to make him do so."¹

Hortense probably performed the office so confidently expected of her. Her position at the Consular Court, especially when, as at present, acting as mistress of the house, whilst Duroc occupied the post of Governor of the Palace, must have been in any case a difficult one, necessitating constant intercourse with the man she had once loved; and that no breath of slander ever attached to the relations of the two says much for the discretion of both. The marriage, whether aided by Hortense or not, took place in August. According to the Duchesse d'Abrantès, it did not prove happy; and when, long after, the question of Joséphine's divorce had become a practical one, Duroc, if the Duchess is to be believed, took the opportunity of avenging his wrongs by refusing to use what influence he might have had with the Emperor in her favour. The recollection of the part her mother had played in preventing his marriage with Hortense recurring to his memory, he had, she says, no pity. Pointing out to him the unhappy Empress as, grief and desolation printed on her countenance, she entered the throne-room, the Duchess

¹ *Correspondance de Madame Campan*, t. i. p. 208.

took him to task. "How," she asked him, "can you fail to have compassion on that?"

In silence he gave the questioner a long look; then directed her gaze towards the spot where, at the far end of the room, two women were to be seen side by side, the one seated, the other standing.

"'Look well,' he said to me, very low. 'It is Heaven—and Hell. Who did it all? Was it not she? No, I have no pity.'"

Thus the summer of 1802 was spent. Soon after Joséphine's return from Plombières the First Consul had removed to Saint-Cloud, which, whilst affording greater freedom than was possible at the Tuileries, was better suited to purposes of state than Malmaison. It was here, says Bourrienne, that Napoleon first rehearsed the great drama of the Empire, and began to introduce customs and etiquette recalling the usages of the monarchy. Well aware of the influence exercised upon the masses by pomp and ceremony, he made use of human weakness whilst he despised it.

"How worthy men are of the contempt with which they inspire me," he would say to his secretary. "I have only to gild the uniforms of my virtuous Republicans, and they belong to me."¹

Hortense too had removed to a new abode. The little house inhabited by Napoleon and his wife during their first months of marriage was no longer adequate

¹ *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. v. p. 6.

to his brother's dignity, and during the summer the First Consul had bought No. 16 in the same street, a magnificent house luxuriously furnished, and had presented it to the newly married couple. At this place, as summer made way for autumn, Hortense awaited the birth of her child. It took place on October 10.

CHAPTER VII

1802—1804

The Life-Consulate—The Bonaparte family—Birth of Napoleon Charles—Louis and Hortense—Napoleon and the child—A visit to Mortefontaine—The summer in Paris—Louis' renewed suspicions—At Compiègne.

SOME weeks before the birth of Hortense's first child a political crisis had occurred, rendering the burning question of a successor to Napoleon's greatness of more moment than before. The Life-Consulate had been conferred upon him. Practically, the measure left the situation almost untouched. The fact of the absence of any competitor, rather than the decree of a senate, assured to the man at the helm the continuance of his power. It was the prelude of what was to follow—the ante-room, so to speak, of the empire—and set an official seal upon the autocracy already established.

In taking a general survey of this period, as well as of that succeeding it, it is impossible to withstand a depressing sense of the littleness, with the one great exception, of those who fill the stage. The eye seeks in vain amongst the crowds forming a background to the central figure for any personality distinguished by

true heroism or beauty. There are great soldiers, men skilled in their particular art of war, and possessing the virtues of courage and endurance belonging to their craft. Of intrinsic eminence or loftiness of character, the lack is striking and lamentable. The dog-like quality of fidelity to a master, combined with a desire for the advancement that master could alone confer, is the ruling feature of those around him. In some, personal devotion predominated; in others, as was to be amply demonstrated at a later date, self-interest reigned supreme, the two motives combining to produce useful tools, instruments that could be relied upon to perform the work required of them. But it would be difficult to find an instance amongst the men called to the front during the Consulate or the Empire of purity of aim, absence of selfish ambition, self-sacrifice, true intellectual or moral greatness. Whether amongst the adherents or the foes of the new despotism—Republicans, Royalists, or Imperialists—you seek in vain for a Hampden, a Falkland, a Strafford, a Cromwell, or any of the great names illuminating the history of the seventeenth-century struggle in England. It was as if the nation, weary of the blood-drenched idealism of the revolution, had abjured all idealism alike. Principle was merged in the lust of possession, faith had but one object, and that object was Napoleon Bonaparte.

That faith Napoleon shared. He believed in himself. He also believed, in a measure, in his family. From the indistinguishable mass around him the figures that stand out owe their prominence to no conspicuous

merit, intellectual force, or high character. They are almost all members of the Bonaparte clan, or connected with it by marriage ; men and women whose position is the result of the accident of birth and of their relationship to the great adventurer. Four brothers, three sisters, destitute of his gifts but—some of them, at least—participating in his insatiable ambition, were ever at hand to claim their share in the fruits of his success—as if, Napoleon once declared in a moment of bitter sarcasm, his position had been inherited from “le feu roi, notre père.” Yet he was the first to admit the very pretensions he derided. It was from amongst his brothers he chose the Kings who were to fill the thrones of Europe—Joseph, always, in his Corsican provincialism, anxious to vindicate his rights as elder brother ; Louis, not devoid of principle and a sense of duty, but a dreamer and a morbid invalid ; even Jérôme. Lucien, it was true, offended too deeply to be forgiven ; but it was not until after repeated attempts at conciliation that Napoleon recognised the impossibility of entrusting a crown to him. Nor were his sisters forgotten. Elisa Bacciochi, with nothing but her blood to recommend her, was to rule over a principality. Pauline, married first to Leclerc, then to Borghese, vain, unprincipled, frivolous, beautiful, the typical *femme légère*, knew she could reckon upon his support. Caroline Murat—the only one of the Bonapartes, according to the Duchesse d’Abrantès, who never learnt to be a Princess—with the poison of asps under her tongue, with her constant sneers, her hungry

ambition, was adroit in obtaining from him what she desired. Eugène de Beauharnais alone asked nothing, submitted cheerfully and without a murmur when it was for a time his stepfather's whim or policy to pass him over, was ever uncomplaining and contented so long as he was permitted to exercise his soldier's profession. The spectacle of the sordid scramble for place and promotion may have sickened him. He had taken his part and adhered to it. He was never a suitor.

At the present juncture the question of the nomination of a successor and the principle of heredity were vehemently debated ; nor was Joséphine, anxiously on the watch for rocks ahead, blind to the additional danger involved in her husband's new dignity. "The Life-Consulate was big with heredity ; heredity big with divorce."¹ One loophole for escape remained ; in her new-born grandson she discerned a possible deliverer. The Bonaparte family concurred in her opinion, and banded themselves together to defeat her hopes.

Not the least curious fact belonging to the opening years of the nineteenth century is the part played, during his short span of life, by Napoleon Charles, the unconscious child upon whom so many expectations centred. From the time that he lay, an infant in his cradle in the newly acquired and magnificent house in the rue de la Victoire, until the day, scarcely more than four years and a half later, when he took his way hence, a battle raged over him, now hidden, now

¹ *Napoléon et sa famille* (F. Masson), t. ii, p. 120.

openly manifest. From the first the dreaded and formidable rival of other claimants to his uncle's favour, he controlled in a manner the destinies of many.

At the time when little Napoleon was born, his father, recalled by the First Consul's orders, that he might be present at his wife's confinement, had been three days in Paris. It was in Louis' name that the birth, five days later, was registered, the signatories being his brother and Joséphine. It may be that his fatherhood had softened him temporarily towards the mother of his child ; and the relations between husband and wife appear to have undergone a transient change for the better. Proud of his boy, for his own pleasure and that of Hortense, he caused a portrait to be painted of the infant when he was no more than a few days old ; and according to his mother-in-law, wrote to make a personal announcement of the birth of his son to the great-grandmother in Martinique.

"He is the happiest of men," added Joséphine, "in being a father, especially of a great boy. I assure you, with pleasure, that the marriage is a very happy one, and that they are very fond of each other."¹

It may be that, in Hortense's mother, hope had in truth revived, and that now that a third had come to complete the household, she anticipated a happy future. Madame Campan, looking on from Saint-Germain, and taking a keen interest in all that took place in the rue de la Victoire, appears to have

¹ *Madame Louis Bonaparte*, p. 92.

shared her cheerful forecasts. Writing to Hortense in allusion to her name-day—the feast of Ste. Eugénie, November 15—true to her character, she hastened to improve the occasion.

“I am told, my dear angel,” she wrote, “that M. Louis has fêted, with grace and feeling, the mother of his dear little one. I was enchanted. She, too, will assuredly have been so also. Her heart is easily affected ; it will have been much touched. But I know her well—this *maman* of the dear Napoleon in the cradle. Will she have shown it ? It is a question betraying the governess—shall I venture to say the very tender mother ? I know that simple souls, pure and elevated, scorn demonstration ; but what has its origin in good qualities sometimes becomes a defect in common life. Forgive me, dear Hortense—these reflections rise from the bottom of my heart ; for I am told that you had tears in your eyes at the moment of your surprise,¹ and I was charmed that your habitual reserve should have been thus overcome.”²

It must have been whilst this transitory amelioration in the domestic conditions in the rue de la Victoire lasted that Hortense made a portrait of her husband in his colonel's uniform ; and Louis is said to have gone so far as to address verses to his wife, though she displayed too little appreciation of his poetic efforts to encourage a repetition of the experiment.

¹ The gift of her child's portrait.

² *Correspondance de Madame Campan*, t. i. p. 214.

Meanwhile, her recovery had been rapid, and she was soon in a condition to resume her usual habits. Certain changes had taken place in the Consular Court, not devoid of significance. Four *dames du palais* had been appointed to attend upon Joséphine, Madame de Rémusat—fortunately for the light she was to throw upon the interior of the household—being one of them ; and the etiquette observed at Saint-Cloud was more and more approaching to that surrounding a monarch.

The First Consul and his wife had been absent in Normandy during Hortense's convalescence ; but by the middle of November they had returned to Paris, and meetings between mother and daughter were as frequent as either could make them. Louis Bonaparte, however, had reverted to his former attitude of suspicion and mistrust, and so long as he remained at home his wife's liberty was curtailed. She was forbidden to resort to Saint-Cloud oftener than was strictly necessary ; nor was she ever to pass the night at the palace, however urgently she might be pressed to do so. She was further, according to her husband's directions, to make it appear that in pursuing this line of conduct she was acting upon her own initiative. How far Hortense yielded obedience to his instructions must be matter of conjecture ; she was learning the advantages of silence, and to her husband's brother, at least, it would seem that she made no complaint. "The First Consul," says Madame de Rémusat, ". . . was grateful to her for her silence, which



JOSEPH BONAPARTE, KING OF SPAIN.

JOSEPH BONAPARTE, AFTERWARDS KING OF SPAIN.

facilitated matters for him, and permitted him to take no side in the affair." ¹

It was scarcely to be expected that she should have entirely kept her counsel with regard to her mother. Both had their private subjects of sorrow and anxiety ; both were the objects of the envenomed hatred of the Bonaparte race ; nor was it possible that each should not be aware of the position of the other. To Madame de Rémusat, who, always at hand, was acquiring some degree of influence over her mistress, Joséphine spoke freely of her cares.

"It is a great misfortune," she said, "that I have given no son to Bonaparte. It will always be a means made use of by hatred to disturb my peace."

"But, madame," answered Madame de Rémusat, "it seems to me that your daughter's son does much to repair that misfortune. The First Consul loves him ; he may end by adopting him."

Joséphine confessed that the suggested solution would answer to her desires. "But," she added, "Louis Bonaparte's jealous and stormy character will always oppose it. In their malice his family have repeated to him the outrageous reports as to my daughter. Hatred gives the child to Bonaparte, and that would be sufficient to prevent Louis from consenting to any such arrangement. You see how he keeps himself apart, and how my daughter is forced to be on her guard as to the least of her actions. . . ." ²

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 160.

² *Ibid.* t. i. p. 205.

The relations between Hortense and her husband following upon the improvement temporarily produced by the birth of their child were, in fact, at best those of a dreary neutrality ; and, though continuing under the same roof, their lives were spent, so far as was possible, apart. True to his proclivities, Louis' time was chiefly divided between scientific pursuits and attention to his health, an absorbing interest and preoccupation. One remedy after another had been tried in the hope of combating the paralytic affection of his hand, and in January he was writing that, in obedience to the orders of his physicians, he had not crossed the threshold of his room for a month. Yet, though scrupulously carrying out the prescribed measures, he evidently entertained doubts of the result. Would they prove successful ? he questioned in a letter to one of the special friends with whom his correspondence reached the dimensions of a schoolgirl's with her favourite confidant. Could he even count upon power to perform the programme recommended by his medical advisers ? He admitted that he was uncertain. "For twelve years—that is, ever since I have known myself to be in the world—I have always learnt not to build castles in Spain." The melancholy confession of precocious wisdom gives the key to much of the failure marking his life. To hope is, in a measure, to have ; happiness, like the Kingdom of Heaven, has often to be taken by storm, nor is it the faint-hearted by whom it is won.

The lesson he had mastered he was industriously engaged in impressing upon his wife ; and Hortense, too, must have been fast learning not to reckon, with the sanguine confidence of old, upon the future. On a single point the interests of the two found a common meeting-ground. Both loved their little son. From the first Hortense had proved a devoted mother, and Louis, says one of his biographers, spent all the time to be spared from care of his health in attention to nursery details. "Fortunately," adds M. Masson, "such time was short—barely three months during the first year—otherwise the child would have died of it."¹

Early in January the Bonaparte family had been thrown into mourning by the news of the tragic death, from yellow fever, of Napoleon's brother-in-law, General Leclerc, to whom he had entrusted the command of the expedition sent to St. Domingo with the object of riveting their chains upon the revolted negroes. Leclerc had been accompanied to his post by Pauline, who, violent in her short-lived despair, cut off her hair to serve as a face-cloth for her dead husband. The arrival of the funeral ship, with the body on board, followed hard upon the New Year's festivities.

If Hortense was not to be happy, she was evincing a determination to be gay, and it is made a subject of reproach by her enemies that, at nineteen, as well as at a later date, there adhered to her traces of the spirit of the light-hearted *pensionnaire*. An unusually

¹ *Napoléon et sa famille* (F. Masson), t. ii. p. 360.

close bond united, through their after-lives, those who had shared Madame Campan's instructions, and Hortense in particular was never unmindful of her early associates. Her schoolmates were gathering around her in Paris; and her salon was beginning to attract some few of the artists whose society she loved. Dances, too, were given in the rue de la Victoire, and, at one of them, taking place during the Carnival, the First Consul was present, and, issuing his orders to the orchestra, joined vigorously in a *contredanse*.

Thus the winter and early spring wore away. A journey to Italy had been projected for the sake of Louis' health, and thither it seems that Hortense was expected to accompany him, since the Grimaldi Palace at Genoa was prepared for the reception of the two. The plan was abandoned, and when, in March, Louis left Paris for Montpellier, he went alone. It was at this last place that he was informed of his intended advancement to the post of Brigadier-General. But promotion in the army had so little charm for a man never at heart a soldier that only after an interval of ungracious hesitation did he accept the proffered rank.

For Hortense the months covered by his absence—it was not till September that he returned to Paris, there to undergo yet another medical treatment—had been a period of comparative liberty. Whether or not the regular system of espionage he is charged with having instituted had been already set on foot,

she was probably aware that few details of her conduct would not become known to the melancholy valetudinarian at Montpellier, ready, in his morbid distrust, to put the worst construction upon her every action, however innocent. But when no longer brought into daily collision with her husband, she was young enough to seek and to find consolation and compensations in life. Little Napoleon Charles was alone enough to reconcile her to her circumstances, and though she appears to have been singularly devoid of ambition on her son's behalf, the strong attachment shown by the First Consul for the child cannot have failed to be a source of gratification. The baby was clearly scarcely less at home in the palace than in the rue de la Victoire. At a moment when important interests were at stake and the rupture of the peace with England was imminent, we are afforded a glimpse of the interior of the Tuileries, and of Napoleon seated on the floor, playing with the five-months-old child in his wife's apartments, whilst the Corps Diplomatique was assembling for its monthly audience below. The First Consul was, indeed, in so serene a mood that Madame de Rémusat ventured to observe that the letters presently to be dispatched by the ambassadors would surely tell of nothing but peace and concord. "Bonaparte," she adds, "laughed, and continued his games with the child." The *dame de compagnie* was soon to realise her mistake. With the announcement that the diplomatic circle was formed, the First Consul's face abruptly changed, his gaiety

disappeared, and the stormy scene that followed was the prelude of the war.¹

In June Napoleon and his wife started on a two months' tour in the northern provinces and in Belgium. An incident taking place on the eve of their departure is an example of the strained relations existing between Joséphine and her husband's family. Before leaving Paris, Napoleon, with his wife, had gone to pay a farewell visit to his eldest brother, at whose house at Mortefontaine a family gathering had been arranged. All might have gone well ; but when dinner-time approached, Joseph Bonaparte communicated to his brother his intention, as host, of giving his hand to his mother, who formed one of the party, and of placing her upon his right, the seat upon his left being assigned to Joséphine. On the alert to discern and resent a slight to his wife, and seeing in the proposal a deliberate display of disrespect, the First Consul at once demanded that to her should be accorded the place of honour destined for Madame Mère ; and, upon Joseph's refusal to concede the point, took matters into his own hands, crossed the salon to Joséphine, conducted her in person in to dinner, seated her next to him, ordering her lady-in-waiting to occupy the chair on his other side and leaving the hostess, Madame Joseph, at the end of the table alone.

It was not a cheerful repast. Though Joséphine might be gratified at the heat displayed by her husband

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 119.

in her defence, she was not of a belligerent nature, and was visibly depressed ; the brothers were out of temper ; Madame Letitia, it may be imagined, no less so ; and Napoleon vouchsafed to address none of his family, devoting himself throughout the meal to the entertainment of his wife and her *dame de compagnie*. The remainder of the visit, "as might be imagined, passed coldly," and on the following day the guests took their departure, one more item having been added to the cherished grievances of the Bonaparte clan.¹

For the present it might have appeared that Joséphine had little to fear. The provincial tour was in all respects a success, and his wife was included in the ovations lavished upon the First Consul. The enthusiasm shown bordered, indeed, upon delirium. Wherever the First Consul went he was met by harangues and addresses, accompanied by entertainments in his honour, at which—although, in his own words, "not made for pleasure"—he had no choice but to assist. Here and there significant hints were not wanting that another title would better become him than that of Consul. No flattery was too fulsome to be addressed to the popular hero. "To assure happiness and glory to France, to give back to all nations freedom of commerce and of the seas, to humiliate the audacious disturbers of the two worlds and to establish at length peace on earth, God created Bonaparte, and then rested." So ran the address of the Prefect of the department of Pas-de-Calais.

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Kemusat*, t. i. p. 236.

Joséphine, for her part, won golden opinions by her gentleness and grace, and for her, too, the journey was a triumphal progress. Yet, as ever, her eyes turned wistfully towards the daughter she had left behind. Since quitting Paris, she wrote to Hortense from Lille, she had been incessantly occupied in receiving compliments. Each morning, and often the evening as well, was taken up by receptions. Balls must also be attended. "I should have taken great pleasure in it had I been able to share it with you, or at least to see you enjoy it. I feel very much the separation from my dear Hortense, and from my grandson, whom I love almost as well as I love his *maman*." Messages from Bonaparte and Eugène follow, the former expressing a fear that the child might have forgotten him by the time he returns to Paris.¹ In the same letter Hortense is informed that Pauline, the disconsolate six-months' widow, had written to ask her brother's consent to her marriage with the Prince Borghese.

It had doubtless seemed well to Louis Bonaparte that his wife should remain in Paris and there attend to her maternal duties. It might have been more conducive to the peace of the household had she accompanied the consular train. Left behind, she had indulged in amusements which, innocent as they were, had not been marked by discretion. Disregard of conventional restrictions was one of her characteristics. Friends admit the fact; adverse critics dwell

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. ii, p. 227.

upon it. "Hortense," observes the author of *Le dernier des Napoléons*, "had found means of scandalising the men of her day by her disdain of prejudices ;" and the woman who elects thus to play the game of life must be prepared to pay her forfeits. To run counter to opinion, to disregard convention, was, in her position, to risk the loss of reputation. Surrounding her were persons ready to put an evil interpretation upon her every action, nor would women such as Pauline Leclerc or Caroline Murat acquit her of worse than folly. But she was still under twenty ; the springtide of life was in her veins, and she had thrown care to the winds. Hortense de Beauharnais had for the moment got the better of Madame Louis Bonaparte, and dignity suffered. Many of her former play-fellows were, like herself, left, in the absence of their husbands, to their own devices, and, with Hortense as ringleader, were using their temporary liberty in no prudent fashion. Visits were paid incognito to balls and public places of amusement, theatre parties were made up, and country expeditions organised, such as one to the forest of Saint-Germain, where Madame Campan, with a contingent of schoolgirls, was to be met ; a *rendez-vous* was to take place at the pavilion, whither beer, cider, wine, ice, cutlets, Savoy biscuits, tartlets, and other delicacies specially appealing to the youthful palate were to be brought, ready for cooking ; the doctor, the Abbé Bertrand, and M. Bequin with his fiddle being included in the party.¹

¹ *Correspondance de Madame Campan*, t. i. p. 219.

In forms of diversion of this nature—wanting in dignity though they may have been, and suggestive of a schoolgirl's holiday rather than of recreation suited to adult years—it might be thought that there was little to cause serious disquiet to the most mistrustful of husbands. Yet reports from Paris, doubtless reaching Montpellier in an exaggerated shape, gave fresh offence to Louis ; and Napoleon, on his return, thought it well to take order with the delinquents of less note, and forthwith dispersed the band of culprits by dispatching them, with their husbands, on foreign missions. It was impossible thus to deal with his brother's wife, and Hortense remained, to expiate alone the merriment of those summer days. Renewed precautions were taken by Louis ; she was watched day and night ; returning to Paris, he resumed a personal supervision over her conduct, and it was no wonder that, to quote Madame de Rémusat, her life passed, if in peace, “assez tristement.” She was not permitted to be present even at a theatrical entertainment at the house of Lucien Bonaparte. “Hortense would have liked much to come,” wrote the host, “but she is not allowed to do so. Louis therefore comes alone.”¹

To treat his wife constantly as suspect was for Louis to put the last touch to the barrier between them ; and it is difficult to determine which was most to be pitied,

¹ Louis may have had another reason than the exercise of a petty tyranny in this instance ; since it was only on October 26, 1803, that Lucien regularised his connection with Madame Jouberton, by a private marriage.

the nervous invalid, unhealthy in mind and body, sad and solitary, the prey of morbid fancies, yet whose dreams had been of a happy wedded life, a wife loving and loved ; or the girl, undisciplined and impatient of restraint, gentle and obstinate, sometimes adopting the attitude of a victim, submissive and resigned, sometimes resenting her wrongs, real or imaginary, and forgetting that her partner in misfortune had even fewer alleviations of his lot than she.

Hortense was allowed to assist at the marriage of Pauline Leclerc, privately celebrated at the house of her eldest brother, most of the bride's family being also present. The First Consul was not. In order, it may be, to mark his disapproval of the unseemly haste shown by his sister in choosing a second husband, he left Paris two or three days before the ceremony, to visit, accompanied only by his military staff and by M. de Rémusat, the northern camp and fleet. Other reasons may have contributed to make an absence from the capital welcome to him. His conduct had lately caused fresh anxiety to Joséphine, little in the habit of suffering in silence, and Napoleon's military duties may have afforded him a welcome excuse for escaping from her reproaches. To Madame de Rémusat, summoned to Boulogne in consequence of her husband's illness, he expressed his views with his accustomed frankness.

“ She troubles herself far more than she need,” he said ; “ Joséphine always fears that I may fall seriously in love. She does not understand that love is not

made for me—for what is love? A passion setting the entire universe on one side, and seeing on the other the beloved object alone. Assuredly I am not the man to yield myself up after this exclusive fashion. What, then, do distractions matter to her into which my affections do not enter? This is what her friends should persuade her.”¹

Joséphine's friends would not find the task easy. Whatever might be the case with him now, she knew from personal experience that the immunity he boasted was of too few years' standing to be counted upon as permanent. At this moment she was further saddened by a fresh separation from her daughter. The regiment commanded by Louis was quartered at Compiègne, and he had determined to take up his residence there for the present. If Hortense was unwilling to leave Paris, she apparently yielded with a good grace, and Mésangère—her husband's confidant—bears witness to the fact that her attitude towards his friends was not otherwise than conciliatory. “She is always extraordinarily friendly,” he wrote to his mother, “and has received me with her accustomed kindness.”

Whether or not, as Madame Campan was pleased to assume, Hortense was enjoying the happiness of a life *en ménage*, she had no choice in the matter, and peace appears to have prevailed. Napoleon Charles—“already spoken of in the world,” wrote Madame Campan again, “and said to display eminent

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 265.

greed ('une gourmandise distinguée')"—will have done something to compensate his mother for the lack of her usual amusements. In the comparative quiet of the country she reverted to her former pursuits of drawing and music, under the direction of her old masters, and was beginning to attempt composition.

Thus the winter of 1803-4 passed away.

CHAPTER VIII

1804

Georges Cadoudal's conspiracy—General Moreau's complicity—Execution of the Duc d'Enghien—Project of adoption—Bonaparte jealousy—The plan abandoned—Relations of Louis and his wife—The Empire established—Hortense raised to the rank of Princess—Eugène de Beauharnais—The rue Cérutti—Saint-Leu—Hortense and Napoleon—The Empress—Imperial etiquette.

THE year 1804 was a memorable one. In the course of it Napoleon reached the summit of his ambition, and was declared Emperor. Not more than a few weeks earlier an event had occurred destined to leave, perhaps, the darkest stain of any it sustained upon his reputation. This was the execution of the Duc d'Enghien.

The opening of the year had found Hortense at Compiègne, but she was expected in Paris in February. "I am writing to Louis," her mother told her in a letter of the 7th of that month, "and am asking him to keep his promise of coming to pass the Carnival with us ; and as I rely upon his word, I count also upon kissing you on Shrove Tuesday. They are awaiting your arrival to fix the days for the balls."¹ In the same letter Joséphine communicated to her

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. ii, p. 229.

daughter the news of the discovery of the Royalist conspiracy headed by Georges Cadoudal. It was found to have reached perilous dimensions and even to have drawn into its nets the Republican General, Moreau. The danger averted by the discovery was an earnest of risks threatening the head of the State, and fresh information daily acquired with regard to the plot must have thrown a gloom over the preparations for the Carnival festivities. Moreau's guilt in particular had, at first, seemed almost incredible, and his old companion-in-arms had been unprepared for the blow. Repairing to the Tuileries on the day that Joséphine's letter to Hortense had been written, Madame de Rémusat found the First Consul in his wife's apartment, seated by the fire, with little Napoleon on his knee. He was grave of aspect as he played mechanically with the child, and Joséphine's eyes were red.

"Do you know what I have just done?" he asked. "I have given the order for Moreau's arrest." It was evident that he had not acted without reluctance and a knowledge of the motives likely to be attributed to him. It would be said, he added, that he was jealous—jealous of Moreau! Had he not, a score of times, prevented him from compromising himself? But he was weak and proud, led by women and urged on by parties. So Napoleon explained, justifying his conduct probably rather to his own conscience than to the lady-in-waiting. Rising, he crossed over to Joséphine.

"Every one has not, as I have, a good wife," he said with unusual gentleness—it was known that Madame

Moreau was violent and ambitious. "You weep, Joséphine. But why ? are you afraid ?"

Joséphine disclaimed any alarm, save as to the condemnation to be incurred by the arrest. But though not indifferent to public opinion, Napoleon saw matters in another light. He might, he admitted, have shut his eyes, and allowed the culprit the opportunity of escape. It would then, however, have been said that he dared not bring him to trial. Justice must take its course.¹

The following weeks were full of anxiety. Yet domestic cares were not forgotten in public perils. Early in March, in a conversation with Bourrienne, no longer secretary, but an occasional visitor at the Consular Court, Napoleon reverted to the vexed question of Hortense and her marriage. It is possible that her visit to the Tuileries had impressed upon him by ocular demonstration the unsatisfactory nature of her relations with her husband. After talking vaguely of the conspiracy—the absorbing topic of the hour—he turned with a change of subject to the slander directed against himself and his stepdaughter. Had Bourrienne, he asked, heard it repeated since he had quitted his service ?

"Yes, General, often," was the secretary's frank reply. "I confess I did not expect that calumny to be so long-lived."

"It is indeed horrible," returned Napoleon. "You know how much truth there is in it. You saw and heard

¹ *Mémoires de Madame Rémusat*, t. i. pp. 300-3

all ; nothing could have escaped you. You were in her confidence when she was in love with Duroc. . . . You never credited this odious imputation?"

Bourrienne assured him he had not ; and, dismissing the distasteful subject, the First Consul proceeded to speak of Hortense : her past life, her present one, the developments her marriage had taken.

"It has not turned out as I wished," he observed. "Their union is not happy. It grieves me, because I love them both."¹

Events were succeeding each other too rapidly to leave more than scanty leisure to mourn the irrevocable. Into the circumstances of the approaching tragedy, the possibility that the entire responsibility for the death of the Duc d'Enghien did not rest with Napoleon, and that his hand was in a measure forced by subordinates, this is not the place to enter. Hortense's share in the affair was limited to horror and regret at a deed accomplished before time had been afforded for remonstrance or protest. Royalist in her sympathies, so far as she was in any sense political, her sentiments can be no matter of doubt. They were participated in to the full by her mother, who, as much as she dared, attempted to bring her influence to bear to avert the catastrophe. In this instance she was powerless.

Concerning the condition of the interior of the consular household at this juncture, information is unusually detailed. It had been settled that the week

¹ *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. v. p. 142.

following upon Passion Sunday should be spent at Malmaison. Joséphine was glad of it. "Paris," she said, "frightened her." But she was carrying a disquieting secret to her country retreat, and as the journey to Malmaison was made—never inclined to be silent as to her cares—she communicated her apprehensions to her travelling companion. By Tuesday, March 20, they had been justified. On that day it became known at Malmaison that the Prince had been arrested, that he was to be conveyed to Vincennes, and that that very night his trial was to take place. Distracted by fears, afraid to importune her husband, afraid to be silent, Joséphine braced herself to make another attempt to save the young man. Again she failed; and the day passed heavily away. At dinner the little Napoleon, who had been brought from Paris—his parents did not arrive from Compiègne until the following morning—afforded some distraction. Placed on the table, his uncle watched with amusement how the eighteen-months-old child overturned all around him. When the meal was over, seated upon the floor, the First Consul continued to play with his living toy. Suddenly he caught sight of Madame de Rémusat.

"Why have you no rouge?" he asked abruptly, looking at her fixedly. "You are too pale. What!" as she excused herself by pleading an oversight, "a woman forget her rouge! That will never happen to you, Joséphine," he added, with a laugh. "There are two things that are becoming to women—rouge and tears."

Later, he engaged in a game at chess. All present were silent, the dim sense of imminent calamity oppressing them. Under his breath the First Consul hummed a tune, or repeated verses half aloud. Then, as the sound of a carriage was heard, and General Hullin was announced, he pushed back the table roughly, and passed with him out of the room, to reappear no more. During that night the young Duke was tried, condemned, and executed. The blot on Napoleon's fame was irreparable. That the Prince was hostile to the Consulate was self-evident, that he was waiting in readiness to profit by any movement organised against it cannot be doubted. On the other hand, he had not been on French soil when seized ; his complicity in the murderous projects of the conspirators was unproved ; and the speed with which the affair was conducted was, in any case, a scandal. A signal example had, however, been made, and by its means it was hoped to strike terror into those engaged in the attempt to overthrow the government.

In Louis Bonaparte's account of the event his position, as well as his wife's, is made clear. Being at the time at Compiègne, he could, he explains, do nothing to avert the catastrophe. On hearing that it was imminent, he repaired at once, with Hortense, to Paris, but was too late to interpose. Nor would he, had it been otherwise, have been able to prevent the deed. As it was, he could only add his tears to those of Joséphine, Hortense, and his sister Caroline, all equally grieved at the calamity. Napoleon, he

states, remained for several days melancholy, abstracted and sullen. There was no doubt that he had been treacherously and rapidly hurried into the disaster. Such was Louis' conviction.¹

When Hortense and her husband reached Malmaison on the morning of the Duke's death, Louis preserved a gloomy silence ; Madame Louis, visibly "scared (*effarouchée*), seemed not to venture to feel and to demand what she ought to think " ;² Joséphine, in tears, did not scruple to address reproaches to her husband ; and though Eugène appeared to observers to see in the victim nothing but a conspirator who had met with his deserts, his attitude must have been the result of a soldier's instinct of obedience to the will of his superior officer, since in his own account of the affair he describes the grief it caused him, especially owing to his attachment for Napoleon—"it seemed to me that his glory was thereby tarnished."³

At dinner the unconcern affected by the First Consul on the previous night had slipped from him like a mask. He sat silent, absorbed in meditation. Only when the meal was over did he speak, as if giving utterance to the conclusion reached during his prolonged reverie.

"At least," he said harshly—"at least they will see what we are capable of ; and I hope for the future they will leave us in peace."

¹ *Documents historiques.*

² *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, from which most of the foregoing details are drawn.

³ *Mémoires du Prince Eugène*, t. i. p. 91.



PRINCE JOACHIM MURAT.

In after-days Hortense attempted to defend her stepfather's conduct, and to exculpate him from the guilt of the execution. He had, it was true, ordered the arrest and trial of the young Duke. But she declared, of her personal knowledge, that he had intended his pardon ; and that the sentence was carried out independently of his final instructions. Napoleon's secretary, Ménéval, concurs in this view, and brings forward a certain amount of evidence in support of the hypothesis that, had less haste been used and the Prince's demand for an interview transmitted to the First Consul, affairs would have taken a different turn. The tone afterwards assumed by Napoleon was, according to his secretary, the result of a generous determination to accept the odium of the transaction rather than shift it on to other shoulders. Difficult as it is to believe that subordinates would have acted in a matter of so much importance without authorisation from a principal little prone to delegate his authority, a passage in the memoirs of the Duc de Rovigo, General Savary, may be quoted in favour of the contention that Napoleon was not responsible for the deed. He had appeared, the Duke states, astonished at the rapidity with which the sentence had been executed, though not at the sentence itself.

"Voilà un crime" is said to have been his comment, "et qui mène à rien."¹

Other events quickly followed upon the death of the Duc d'Enghien. Cadoudal's arrest had taken place

¹ *Mémoires du Duc de Rovigo*, t. i. part ii. p. 45.

almost simultaneously with the Duke's ; most of the leading conspirators were in confinement, and the plot was virtually crushed. Meantime the question of succession had reached a critical stage. It was no secret to the First Consul that his intention of adopting his brother Louis' son and of making him his heir had given rise to indignation amongst those who conceived themselves to be thereby injured.

"Do you know, little baby," he once said, in the hearing of other members of his family, addressing the child upon his knee—"do you know that you are in danger of becoming one day a King?"

"And Achille?" asked Murat, with jealous haste, naming his own eldest boy.

"Ah! Achille?" answered Napoleon, carelessly. "Achille will be a good soldier. In any case," he added, continuing to caress his little name-sake and ignoring his sister Caroline's evident wrath, "I advise you, my poor child, if you wish to live, to accept no repasts that may be offered you by your cousins."¹

Too much earnest underlay the jest to make it wise or palatable. The project of adoption had roused all the Bonapartes to fierce antagonism ; Joséphine, on the contrary, perceived in it her best hope of escaping the repudiation always threatening her. Hortense alone seems to have remained indifferent. She had little ambition, and may have entertained fears that the child's exaltation might prove a source of danger to him. All, nevertheless, pointed to the accomplishment

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 354.

of the scheme. On April 4 Napoleon made an explicit announcement of his intentions to his eldest brother, only the more strengthened in his determination by the remonstrances addressed to him by Joseph, who protested that he had not deserved to be thus set aside in favour of a younger brother's son.¹

Undeterred by his opposition, Napoleon's next move was a formal visit, a fortnight later, to Louis Bonaparte, made with the object of ascertaining his views upon the subject. The First Consul was, on this occasion, cold in manner and ill at ease. The consciousness that he was in the unusual position of a solicitor and that it rested with his younger brother to sanction or to veto the plan he had at heart may have produced a sense of constraint, and it was in the end left to Joséphine to disclose the object of the visit to her son-in-law. It had been made, she said, in order to acquaint Louis with a great project. A law upon heredity had been prepared—one more to his profit than to that of any other person, since his son would answer to the conditions imposed, and, failing children of his own, would become Napoleon's heir. Such was her explanation.

Louis, taken unawares, returned vague and non-committing replies. On the morrow he took counsel with Joseph, and from that moment his attitude was determined. Playing upon his well-known weaknesses, his jealousy and distrust, as well as the

¹ *Napoléon et sa famille*, t. ii. p. 368.

hatred of the Beauharnais connection he shared with every member of his family, Joseph had skilfully excited his choler against Joséphine, whose aims would be served by the scheme in question; had recalled to him the calumnies concerning his son's birth, to which the proposed adoption would tend to give a certain force, and pointed out to him the iniquity of sacrificing the interests of his family to a child who, though his son, was also half a Beauharnais, and who would be by this means removed from his care and brought up in the palace under the direction of his mother. To such a point was Louis inflamed by his brother's arguments that his opposition to his son's advancement was thenceforth as unrelenting as that of Joseph, who had nothing to gain by it and everything to lose. Nor did he make any delay in acquainting Napoleon with his decision. Why, he demanded of him, should he give place to his son in the matter of succession? What position would be his when the child, become by adoption his brother's, would occupy a rank superior to his own, independent of him, taking a place immediately below Napoleon's, and regarding his father with uneasiness and possibly contempt?

"No," he reiterated with strange violence, "I will never give my consent, and sooner than renounce the royalty which is to become a part of your inheritance, rather than bow my head before my son, I will quit France; I will take Napoleon with me; and we shall see if you will venture publicly to rob a father of his son."¹

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 354.

Napoleon gave way. Napoleon Charles was not made his heir by adoption. But if the conqueror was defeated, his brothers could not boast that victory remained with them. It was true that Joseph and Louis, with their male heirs, were formally assured their place in the line of succession. But their triumph was rendered null and void by the fact that it was left in Napoleon's power to adopt, at the age of eighteen, any nephew, being a son of either brother, whom he might please to select. Napoleon Charles might have lost his chance for the present, but no one had been allowed to secure the inheritance of which he had been deprived.

The most important result of the controversy, so far as Hortense was concerned, was the added bitterness of the aversion already existing between Bonapartes and Beauharnais. Rightly or wrongly, the project which had given rise in Napoleon's family to so great an amount of indignation was attributed to intrigues carried on by Joséphine ; and Louis reiterated his prohibition of any freedom of intercourse between his wife and her mother, enforcing it by threats not the less effective by reason of their vagueness.

"If you care for her interests at the expense of mine," he said, "I will make you repent it. I will separate you from your son, will shut you up in some distant retreat, whence no human power will be able to withdraw you, and you shall pay with the unhappiness of your whole life for your compliance towards your family." Let her take care above all, he added, that his menaces did not reach his brother's ears. Napoleon's

power should not avail to protect her from her husband's anger.¹

Jealousy and passion had obscured in Louis both common sense and reason. Possibly dimly conscious that such was the case, he appears to have been aware that by his line of conduct a chasm had been definitely opened which future reconciliation would be powerless to bridge.

"You cannot love me," he averred, when Hortense complained of his system of petty tyranny, of letters opened and constant espionage. "You are a woman—consequently full of deceit and malice, the daughter of an unprincipled mother, a member of a family I detest. For all these reasons I watch your every action."²

It does not appear that Hortense made any further attempt at resistance. Ill and suffering—her second son was born some months later—her spirit was for the time broken; she yielded a passive obedience to Louis' authority. The threat of separation from her child was sufficient to ensure so much. But a change passed over her; the strain imposed upon them had been too severe for mind and body alike; the freshness of her youth, at twenty-one, became a thing of the past, and she is said never again to have regained her old gaiety. Silent and timid, she sought sympathy neither from her mother—who, indeed, was not a confidant upon whose discretion she could

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. 1, pp. 355-6.

² *Ibid.* p. 358.

rely—nor from her stepfather. If Napoleon divined, as he can scarcely have failed to do, the condition of affairs, he, too, had decided that silence was best ; and Hortense suffered in loneliness and apart. Those who looked on wondered at the alteration they observed ; and though few will have ventured to break through the wall of reserve she had set up, Madame Campan, affectionate and uneasy, claimed the right to speak, for once venturing to express something more like blame than is commonly to be found in her gentle admonitions.

“Since you have left childhood behind you,” she wrote, “your character has become very serious and strikingly cold. Try to temper this disposition. Unhappily I attribute it to your state of health, and it does not alarm me with regard to the sentiments I desire to preserve of your attachment. But I have always promised you the truth, and I tell you what has struck me.” And she goes on to prescribe as a remedy—poor Madame Campan, after her kind—a course of history to be pursued with Louis as fellow-student.¹ Even with her loving old friend Hortense must have heedfully practised her newly acquired habit of reticence.²

To Eugène alone, when opportunity offered—for Louis’ surveillance extended to the intercourse between brother and sister—she confided her sorrows. To him

¹ *Correspondance de Madame Campan*, t. i. p. 238.

² It was only at a later date that Madame de Rémusat learnt from her the details of this period.

she turned, secure of his love and sympathy. Freed by his exemption from the dominating power of ambition from the bondage endured by those engaged in the struggle to further their personal interests, gay, frank, open, and sincere, Eugène de Beauharnais brings into the hot-house atmosphere of the court a breath of open air. He ever remained, to Hortense, next after her children, and until his premature death, the object of her most passionate affection; and different as they were in many respects, inferior in intellectual and artistic endowments as was Eugène to his sister, the small account made by each of the worldly advantages so strenuously fought for by those around them was a strong point of union.

The time was at hand when this particular characteristic was to be thrown into strong relief. By the middle of May the Consulate was a thing of the past. On the 18th of that month the Senate visited Saint-Cloud, with the object of conferring upon the head of the State, together with the title of Emperor, the crown which was no more than a symbol of the absolute power he already wielded. On the very same day, with the eagerness he always showed in rendering his family participators in his greatness, he appointed Louis Constable, raising him, as well as Joseph Bonaparte, to the rank of Prince, with the right to be called Imperial Highness.

The events of that day realised, for Napoleon, many dreams. Those by whom he was surrounded regarded his elevation each from a standpoint of their

own. To Hortense that standpoint appears to have been one of speculation. Her stepfather, she observed, was a comet of which others were the tail, carried they knew not whither. "Is it for our happiness? Is it for our misfortune? Where will he lead us?"¹ Thus she questioned, looking into the uncertain future with the blue eyes that, like those of a melancholy child, had lost their laughter. For the present she was to occupy the place of a Princess of France, with the title of Imperial Highness. Before the dinner party celebrating the new condition of affairs, Duroc, as Governor of the Palace, announced to the guests one by one Napoleon's decree that Hortense and Madame Joseph should share their husbands' rank. Napoleon's two sisters, Elisa Bacciochi and Caroline Murat, enjoying no similar distinction, were thereby roused to the bitterest indignation. The new Emperor's will was nevertheless law; the company took their seats, and the banquet proceeded.

Whatever might be the case with others, ill at ease or conscious of the embarrassment belonging to new circumstances, Napoleon fell at once into his part—often enough, it may be, rehearsed. Gay and serene, he presided at the table, and it was observed that he never made the slip of employing the Republican mode of address, *citoyen*, now to be replaced by *Monsieur*. His brothers, including the constant malcontent Louis, were well pleased; Joséphine, in spite of the novelty of her position, filled it with her

¹ *Correspondance de Madame Campan*, t. ii. p. 173.

accustomed grace. Hortense is described as *soumise*, passively accepting the dignity bestowed upon her, and perhaps even at that moment interrogating fate, and asking, "Is it for happiness, is it for disaster?" Eugène also showed no sign of the uneasy ambition stirring others. But Murat, only that day appointed to the post of Marshal of France, was silent and constrained, whilst his wife, always violent and uncontrolled, openly displayed her sentiments, and upon the Emperor making use more than once of Hortense's new title, gave way to tears of anger and jealousy. Dinner ended, she proceeded to heap reproaches upon her brother, charging him with treating herself and her sisters with contempt, whilst honours and dignities were bestowed upon strangers. When further, employing the weapons of the weak, she fell swooning upon the ground, Napoleon, hitherto angry and unmoved, was softened, and on the morrow the coveted title was extended to his sisters.

In the scenes following upon the establishment of the Empire, Hortense's part, as wife of the Emperor's brother, was a prominent one. But nothing is more remarkable, in the scramble for place and favour, than the contrast presented by the Beauharnais to others with no greater claim than they upon the Emperor. Joséphine, as Napoleon afterwards affirmed, made no demands on behalf of her son. Hortense, accepting what was bestowed upon her, asked for nothing. Eugène, at first apparently deliberately and purposely overlooked, gave no sign of being con-

scious of a grievance. Accorded none of the privileges which the Emperor's stepson might have expected, and relegated to the *salon d'attente* most distant from the Imperial apartments, he ignored, with rare temper and dignity, what looked like a premeditated slight; and when, somewhat later, he received the offer of the post of Grand Chamberlain did not hesitate to assert his independence by refusing the proffered office—"one," he said, "suited neither to his character nor his tastes." His vocation was that of a soldier. "I must confess, however," he added candidly, when afterwards relating the events of this date, "that had the Emperor offered me the post of Grand Equerry, I might perhaps have accepted it, because it had to do with horses, which I loved passionately, and had something of the character of a regiment."¹ He had his reward. A high military command—the Colonel-Generalship of the Chasseurs—was conferred upon him, carrying with it the distinction of a great Imperial office, and was accepted by him with undisguised gratification.

In her brother's advancement Hortense will have found matter for sincere rejoicing. The elevation of her mother, on the other hand, on one occasion moved her to mirth; and when she heard the epithet of "august" applied to Joséphine by Cambacérès, one of her old irrepressible bursts of laughter so disconcerted the grave official that he stopped short in the harangue he had been in the act of delivering.

¹ *Mémoires du Prince Eugène*, t. i. p. 92.

The breach of decorum is cited by one of Hortense's adverse critics as a proof of the childishness she continued, at intervals, to display. It will strike most readers as a venial fault.

The festivities marking the inauguration of the Imperial form of government were overshadowed by the tragical ends of those involved in the late conspiracy. Pichegru committed suicide in prison; others died upon the scaffold. Some of the culprits upon whom sentence of death had been passed were pardoned; and of these one owed his life to the intercession of the Emperor's stepdaughter. The remainder of the summer was, for Hortense, marked by few events. During a part of it Napoleon was engaged in visiting the camp at Boulogne, afterwards joining his wife at Aix-la-Chapelle, where she had gone to take the waters. Left alone, the new-made Princess reverted, after her old fashion, to the companionship of earlier days, to Madame Campan and the friends of her girlhood. Louis Bonaparte had exchanged the house in the rue de la Victoire—the gift of his brother—for a less cheerful, though more imposing residence, afterwards dignified by the name of palace, in the rue Cérutti, whose large and sombre rooms were not to his wife's taste, the garden being disfigured, after the fashion of the day, with every kind of pseudo-picturesque adornment. In these matters Hortense was allowed little voice; and it was probably by a fortunate chance rather than through any reference to her wishes that her husband acquired, also in the

course of this year, the two estates at Saint-Leu serving for the future as a country home and from which the dispossessed Queen afterwards derived her title.

For the present Hortense's most urgent need must have been that of quiet ; and this was secured to her by the absence of Louis, as usual on a health quest, at Plombières. It was characteristic of her indifference to the prizes offered by Imperial favour that at a time when others were ever competing for it, Napoleon's stepdaughter made no effort to maintain the place she had won in the affections of the man who was the supreme dispenser of all worldly gifts, being even guilty of actual neglect towards him. In a letter to Joséphine he complained that he heard no more of Hortense than if she were at the Congo, adding that he was writing to scold her.¹ The scolding failed to produce any good effect. Aware, it may be, that her letters might, under the system of watchfulness established by Louis, be read by other eyes than those for which they were intended, she continued to entrench herself in silence so far as the brother of her husband was concerned. In September Joséphine was taking her to task for a line of conduct easily open to misconstruction.

"The news you send of Napoleon [the child] gives me great pleasure," wrote her mother from Aix. ". . . The Emperor read your letter. He seemed to me sorry not to receive tidings of you sometimes. He would not accuse your heart if he knew it as I do ;

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i, p. 128.

but appearances are against you. Since he may imagine that you neglect him, do not lose a moment in repairing wrongs that are not real. Tell him that it is through discretion that you have not written to him—that your heart suffered from a rule dictated by respect alone ; that, having always received from him the kindness and tenderness of a father, it would be sweet to you to offer him the homage of your gratitude. Tell him also of your hope of seeing me at the time of your confinement. I cannot even contemplate the idea of being at a distance from you at that moment. Be sure that nothing will prevent my going to take care of you—for your sake and still more for my own. So mention it to Bonaparte, who loves you as his child—which adds much to my feeling for him.”¹

The reply Hortense made to her mother’s admonitions was afterwards shown by Joséphine to one of her ladies. It was impossible, she wrote, that the Emperor could entertain doubts of her attachment ; she must be a monster of ingratitude did she not give him back in affection and thankfulness all he had done for herself and her brother. But she confessed that she was unable to get rid of a little timidity with regard to him ; and this timidity often made the expression of her affection difficult, and was the cause of her silence.²

The love of Joséphine for her children, true and deep throughout her changing fortunes, is one of

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. ii. pp. 234-5.

² *Mémoires de Constant*, t. iii. p. 208.

her attractive features. The old tender relationship, unaffected by shifting scenes, must have afforded a welcome relief from the incidental accompaniments of her present condition, to which the necessary etiquette and constraint can scarcely have failed to impart a species of unreality. In the journal of the royalist lady to whom Hortense's letter was shown, and who, recently attached to the imperial court, was keenly conscious of the anomaly of the situation, a shrewd estimate is to be found of her mistress at this date.

"I have known Joséphine a very short time," she wrote, "but I do not think I am deceived in her. She is quite like a child of ten. She has its kindness, its lightness. She is easily affected—weeps and is comforted in a moment. . . . With just enough intelligence not to be a fool, she is ignorant, like most creoles, and has learnt scarcely anything except by means of conversation. . . . What I find charming in her is her self-distrust—in her position a great merit. Her character is so gentle and even-tempered that it is impossible not to love her." ¹

The same observer confesses to an inclination to laugh at the *ensemble bizarre* presented by the newly organised Court—"C'est un véritable habit d'arlequin que ce cour!" she exclaims, including herself in the spectacle she holds up to ridicule. Yet she was evidently touched by the Empress, often sad enough at heart in the midst of her grandeur and feeling the need,

¹ *Mémoires de Constant*, t. i. pp. 368-9.

like a frightened child, of pouring out her apprehensions to a sympathetic listener.

A practical grievance was involved in the position occupied by Eugène, who had accompanied the Emperor to Aix, and formed part of his suite in the tour subsequently taken by Napoleon and his wife. His good manners and the perfect courtesy remarked upon by the royalist lady already quoted must have been special recommendations in Court life, together with his singular aptitude for propitiating the good opinion of all with whom he was brought into contact ; but it was Napoleon's caprice, at this time, to subject his stepson to objectless slights ; and at Mayence, where the Prince of Baden, another German Prince and their retinues were to be received, the Emperor replied to his wife's question as to the order to be observed that it was not necessary that Eugène should be presented at all to his royal guests. For once Joséphine resented, on behalf of her son, what she might not have had courage to resent on her own account. It was not becoming, she replied, for her sake as well as for his, that the son of the Empress should be thus ignored. For herself, she added, she had asked nothing ; nor had she—in allusion to the tears shed by Caroline Murat—wept in order that she might be made a Princess ; but if her son was to dine at her table with the foreign Princes, he must be introduced to her guests.

So far she had been in the right, nor could any exception be taken to her line of argument. She showed less discretion when she proceeded to quote

precedents drawn from the etiquette observed at the Court of the Bourbons. Napoleon was not likely to be softened by a reference to his predecessors, and, observing that she was for ever citing her "*impertinent ancien régime*," told her that there was no reason that her son should dine at her table on the day in question. This solution of the difficulty would in no wise have answered to the mother's views, and the affair was eventually settled by what corresponded to a sleight of hand, Eugène's presentation taking place before Napoleon entered the salon, and his step-father refraining, doubtless deliberately, from inquiring as to the course pursued. The incident, of small account in itself, but aggravated by Talleyrand, bent upon Joséphine's mortification, is an example of the petty trials belonging to her life at this date. Things destitute of intrinsic importance became of moment when the world was looking on, and when many of those surrounding the court would gladly interpret them in a sense auguring ill for the future fortunes of the Empress.

By the middle of October Joséphine was again in Paris ; and one at least of her subjects of solicitude was at an end. On the 11th of that month Hortense's second son, Napoleon Louis, was born, the event being treated with all the ceremony and pomp befitting the entrance into the world of a member of the Imperial family.

CHAPTER IX

1804—1805

Joséphine's coronation in question—The divorce again mooted—Religious marriage—Hortense's household—The Beauharnais family affection—Eugène's temporary disgrace—Made Prince and Arch-Chancellor—Christening of Hortense's second son—Eugène Viceroy—Hortense at Saint-Leu, at Boulogne—Austerlitz—Eugène's marriage—Hortense's salon.

THE autumn of 1804 was an anxious time for Joséphine. The coronation was to take place, the Pope in person performing the ceremony. It remained uncertain whether Napoleon's wife was to participate in his honours or to assist at the function, like the other members of his family, in the character of a mere spectator. And behind this question—important enough to a woman of Joséphine's temperament—loomed another, infinitely more momentous : that of divorce. Through the autumn months the battle was being waged, Joséphine fighting almost single-handed on the one side, the entire Bonaparte connection, eager to compass her ruin, on the other, the Emperor preserving a neutral attitude, neither confirming his wife's fears nor uttering any word to dispel them.

At one time it seemed that the period of suspense

was at an end, that the fate of the unhappy woman was sealed. By an imprudent, if justifiable, display of jealousy she had roused Napoleon to hot indignation, and in his anger he told her to prepare to quit Saint-Cloud. Wearied out by the watch she kept upon him, he had determined, he said, to be governed by political considerations, and to marry a wife who would bear him children. Eugène de Beauharnais was summoned that arrangements might be forthwith made for his mother's departure.

Though Hortense had not been at Saint-Cloud during this crisis, Madame de Rémusat, dispatched by the Empress to acquaint her with the condition of affairs, found that she was in possession of the facts, her brother having hastened to give her an account of his interview with the Emperor. Receiving his step-father's announcement with submission and without any display of resentment, Eugène had been firm in declining all personal compensations. At a moment of disaster to his mother, he could, he explained, accept no favours, and would accompany her to whatever retreat she might seek, in the West Indies or elsewhere. Napoleon had listened in grim silence, and Eugène had left Saint-Cloud to report what had passed to his sister.

Hortense appeared less moved by the recital than might have been anticipated, her affection for the Empress being what it was. For her part, she said, it was impossible that she should take any share in the dispute, her husband having strictly forbidden her to do

so. Her mother had been very imprudent, but should she lose a crown, she would be left in peace—no small consideration in the eyes of Louis Bonaparte's wife.

"Ah! believe me," she added, "there are many women more unhappy."

On the practical question, she expressed her opinion with clearness and decision. If there was still a chance for Joséphine, it lay in gentleness and tears. Her mother and the Emperor would be better left to themselves, and she counselled Madame de Rémusat to remain, for the present, absent from Saint-Cloud.¹ She proved right. In three days Napoleon's wrath had cooled. Though no longer in anger, he did not, however, conceal from his wife that the question of divorce was not settled, but in abeyance. Speaking with a certain amount of emotion, he told her that, though lacking courage to send her away, it was his ardent desire that she should voluntarily acquiesce in the exigencies of the situation.²

It would have been much to ask of any woman to submit passively to repudiation. Joséphine, loving the world and the things of the world, and deeply attached to the man to whom her fortunes had been linked, could scarcely be expected to become a willing sacrifice to political expediency. It was after another fashion that she acted. She had not lived with Napoleon for eight years without learning to measure both his weakness and his strength, and she

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. ii. pp. 48-9.

² *Ibid.* t. ii. p. 50.

possessed, besides, a shrewdness independent of intellect. Adapting her conduct adroitly to his mood, she assumed a sorrowful gentleness of mien, and aided by the indiscreet and premature demonstrations of triumph made by the Bonaparte family, succeeded, if not in averting, in postponing her doom. Angered by her enemies, softened towards the wife for whom his affection, so far as it went, was genuine, he presently made the abrupt announcement that the Pope was expected, that he should crown them both, and that his wife might proceed with her preparations for the ceremony.¹

If Joséphine was rejoiced, the discomfiture of the Bonapartes was proportionately great. They had in a measure drawn it upon themselves. Carried away by their hostility, they had been unwise. Intensely jealous of any competing authority or claim to equality, to oppose Napoleon was always to strengthen him in his determination to act independently of the judgment of others; and Joseph in particular had been imprudently eager to shape the course of events according to his wishes. Should Joséphine share in the coronation, he had averred, his personal interests would suffer and his daughters be placed on a plane below that occupied, as grandchildren of an Empress, by Louis' sons. It was easy to detect, under the line of argument, the never-sleeping animosity to all those of Beauharnais blood, and in a conversation with Rœderer, official reporter of a debate in the Senate,

¹ *Memoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. ii. p. 53.

the Emperor made no attempt to disguise his irritation.

“They are jealous of my wife,” he said, “of Eugène, of Hortense, of all who surround me. *Eh bien*, my wife has diamonds and debts—nothing else. Eugène does not possess an income of 20,000 livres. I love these children, because they have always been anxious to please me. If there is a cannon shot, it is Eugène who goes to see what it is ; if I have to cross a trench, it is he who gives me his hand. Joseph’s daughters are not yet aware that I am called Emperor ; they call me Consul. They believe that I beat their mother. Little Napoleon, on the other hand, when he passes the grenadiers in the garden, cries out to them, ‘*Vive Nonon*, the soldier.’ They say that my wife is false, that her children’s attentions are interested. Well, be it so. They treat me like an old uncle—it gives, none the less, all the sweetness to my life. I am growing old—I am thirty-six. I want rest.”¹

The contrast presented by the Beauharnais brother and sister to the greedy and restless ambition shown by the Bonapartes served their mother’s cause. To others besides the Emperor the difference was patent. “I was intimately persuaded,” wrote Fouché, “that the gentle and kindly influence of the Beauharnais was preferable to the excessive and imperious encroachments of a Lucien.”² Lucien, it was true, was at this time removed from the scene of action, having preferred a marriage

¹ See *Napoléon et sa famille* (F. Masson), t. ii. p. 453

² *Mémoires de Fouché*, t. i. p. 205.



THE EMPRESS JOSEPHINE.

From the original property No. 11.

with a wife of his own choosing to his brother's favour. But Joseph, quiet and calculating, and Caroline, openly rapacious, to say nothing of *Madame Mère* and others, were at hand to push the family claims ; and it was probably as much owing to the exasperation produced in the Emperor by the spirit they displayed as to his desire to gratify Joséphine that he acceded to her wishes.

Before the coronation she was to win a further victory. It was known that, by one of the inconsistencies of human nature, in this case perhaps due to his Corsican blood, Napoleon attached the utmost importance to a religious marriage, as distinguished from one celebrated with purely civil rites. The fact that Joséphine's had been of the latter nature lent additional insecurity to his wife's position. It was indeed suspected that it was with the object of retaining a loophole of escape that when, at the time of Hortense's wedding, the blessing of the Church had been bestowed upon the union of his sister Caroline with Murat, he had not sought a like confirmation for his own marriage. Joséphine had now her opportunity, and made use of it. Upon the Pope's arrival, she revealed to him, as a scruple of conscience, the state of the case. It was difficult for Napoleon to resist the pressure consequently brought upon him to regularise the connection in an ecclesiastical sense ; and before the *sacre* his uncle, Cardinal Fesch, privately bestowed the nuptial benediction of the Church.

When Hortense recovered from her confinement

the coronation was at hand, and it had become necessary to attend to the remodelling of her household on a scale corresponding to her new rank. Taking into account her relations with her husband, as well as his animosity towards her mother, it is singular to find that, with few exceptions, those appointed to any office in it were selected from amongst her friends, and that many of them belonged to the Beauharnais connection. It has been suggested that an explanation might be furnished by the fact that, from the mode of life adopted by Louis, he lacked associates for whom he could have hoped to gain his brother's approval. For this or other reasons, it is certain that, of the many officials, including Bishop, chaplains, ladies-in-waiting, equerries, chamberlains, secretary, intendant, librarian, and doctors, who were considered essential to the dignity of the Princesse Louis, there were few or none whose appointment was not traceable to her own influence or her mother's. The result was what might have been anticipated. "Her house," says M. Masson, "takes on an air of intimate familiarity, doubtless a little wanting in dignity, and not always of the best princely tone. But in it Hortense is at ease, and can trust those around her." The same writer goes on to draw attention to the absence of vanity displayed in her selection as companions of those who had been acquainted with her at a period of poverty and neglect, and from whom she had then received attention and kindness.¹

¹ *Napoléon et sa famille*, t. ii. pp. 465-6.

The formation of the households of Napoleon's sisters had not been affected with the same facility as that of his stepdaughter. Many of those ready and willing to serve Hortense would have been slow to subject themselves to the authority and caprices of Caroline Murat or Elisa Bacciochi; and it is curious to observe that her sisters-in-law were driven to accept the aid of the despised Empress in filling the vacant posts.

It is not necessary to enter in detail into the ceremonies and rejoicings attending the coronation. In all of them Hortense took her part, and in spite of cares, and anxieties, and sorrows, that winter must have contained much that was pleasant. For the moment, Joséphine's fears had been laid at rest, and though greater formality and more etiquette were observed at Court than in earlier days, the new rules and regulations did not seriously affect her daughter. Louis' prohibition of freedom of intercourse between the two must have been, if not rescinded, relaxed, for his wife was much at the palace, and not seldom her little sons would assist at Napoleon's *déjeuner*, when "he would take them in his arms, caress them, and often would tease them, laughing as if he had been their own age as he smeared their faces with cream or preserves."¹

Eugène was also in Paris, and between him and his sister meetings were frequent. "It was a pleasure to see them together and with their mother. All grandeur then disappeared, replaced by the most intimate family

¹ *Mémoires de Mademoiselle Avrillon*, t. i. p. 147.

unitedness.”¹ The close association of the three was drawing to an end. So far as Eugène was concerned, their paths were for the future to diverge ; and at this very time he had, moreover, fallen into a species of disgrace which must have occasioned his mother and sister serious vexation, if not uneasiness. In the autumn Napoleon had spoken of his stepson with warmth and affection. During the winter, however, a temporary estrangement had been produced. Eugène—so it is said—had become the involuntary rival of the Emperor in a love intrigue. Though first in the field, he had submitted with his unfailing good temper to be supplanted by his formidable competitor. But the fact that the woman distinguished by his stepfather had been the object of the young man’s attentions, supplemented, it may be, by a secret suspicion on Napoleon’s part that her preference had been accorded rather to the Emperor than to the man, had rankled. Towards the end of January Eugène received curt orders to set out, with his regiment, within four-and-twenty hours, for Italy. Again Beauharnais rose to the occasion. In spite of his mother’s tears and lamentations, he insisted that she should attempt no remonstrance, took leave of the Emperor, and quietly obeyed his instructions, riding at the head of his soldiers through the wintry weather.

Hortense was proud of her brother. “If the Emperor had exacted anything of the kind from one of his own family,” she said, “you would see what

¹ *Mémoires de Mademoiselle Avrillon*, t. i. p. 151.

protests, what a disturbance, would be made. He, on the contrary, has not uttered a word. I think Bonaparte will be struck by his obedience.”¹

She was right. Even before Eugène had reached his destination he had had his reward. By February 1, Napoleon's anger had evaporated, and in a letter to the Senate of that date he paid a generous tribute to his stepson's conduct and qualities. Writing to announce the elevation of Murat to the rank of Prince and Grand Admiral, he proceeded to state that promotion had likewise been conferred upon Eugène, and that he had been appointed Arch-Chancellor and made a Prince of the Empire. The intelligence reached his stepson at Lyons, and it must have been with a curious revulsion of feeling that he was made acquainted with the language employed by his stepfather on the occasion. “One thing only really touched me,” he afterwards wrote; “it was the terms in which the Emperor announced my nomination to the Senate.”² The expressions used might well have gratified a man who had suffered, scarcely ten days earlier, an unmerited disgrace, and whose enemies were already triumphing over his fall.

“Of all the acts of our power,” wrote Napoleon of the preferment bestowed upon his stepson, “none has been more grateful to our heart. Brought up from childhood by our care and under our eyes, he has rendered himself worthy of imitating, and, by God's

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. ii. pp. 106-7

² *Mémoires et correspondance du Prince Eugène*, t. i. p. 93.

help, of surpassing the examples and the lessons we have given him. Though still young, we consider him to-day, owing to our experience of him in important matters, one of the supports of the throne, and amongst the most capable defenders of the country. In the midst of the anxieties and the bitterness belonging to the high rank in which we are placed, our heart has felt the need of the sweetness and affection we have found in the tenderness and the comforting attachment of this child of our adoption—a consolation doubtless necessary to all men, but especially to us, whose every moment is devoted to the affairs of nations. Our fatherly blessing will follow this young Prince throughout his career, and with the help of Providence, he will one day prove worthy of the approval of posterity.”¹

The eulogy might have been dictated by the mother and sister of the new-made Prince, and a more decisive blow could not have been struck at those who rejoiced over his downfall and drew from it hopes that that of Joséphine was not far distant. At present, it was clear, the Beauharnais star was in the ascendant, and before the departure of the Pope he was called upon to officiate at the baptism of Hortense's second son, an event celebrated by illuminations in the park of Saint-Cloud and by public festivities.

The prominence given to the ceremony was not without significance. The christening of the second son of a younger brother of the Emperor would not have seemed, on the face of it, a matter of national

¹ *Mémoires et correspondance du Prince Eugène*, t. i. pp. 93-4.

importance. But Napoleon made use of the occasion to emphasise in the eyes of the world the founding of a new dynasty. If the Bonapartes could claim no past, a future was to be theirs, and the infant Napoleon Louis for the moment was the representative of that future. He was a symbol of heredity. For this reason, every friendly court in Europe had been acquainted, after a fashion which must have provoked some amusement in those receiving the intelligence, with the birth of a son to "our sister-in-law, the Princesse Louis." For this reason the magnificence that might have marked the baptism of a Dauphin or a Prince of Wales was almost surpassed at Saint-Cloud.

It is easy to imagine that the whole affair may have seemed to Hortense the result of a strange caprice on the part of her stepfather, and that she looked on with a furtive smile and lifted eyebrows at the ceremonial in the *Salon du Lit* ; where, upon a magnificent couch, covered with a great red cloak lined with ermine, her baby lay in state. To others present—to Joseph and Elisa Bacciochi—Pauline and Caroline were absent on pretence of illness—the day's proceedings must have been cause of bitterness, another proof that, so far, their enemies were triumphant.

The new honours soon to be conferred upon Eugène will have strengthened their sense of defeat. For some little time it had been a question upon whom the crown of Italy, placed at the Emperor's disposal, should be bestowed. He had offered it in the first place to his eldest brother ; but seeing that acceptance

would have debarred the sovereign from a chance of establishing his claim to be Napoleon's heir, Joseph had declined it. It had been next proposed to name the little Napoleon Charles King, the government, during his minority, being carried on by his father and the child remaining in Paris in the custody and guardianship of his uncle.

The arrangement would have been a strange one ; nor was it to be anticipated that Louis should have acquiesced in occupying the position of his son's representative. As, moreover, according to the view he took of it, it was no less calculated than the project of adoption to lend colour to the reports current with regard to the child's parentage, he rejected the offer with passion and indignation. Should he, at the Emperor's desire, go to Italy, it would be, he declared, accompanied by wife and children ; and a stormy interview ended in Louis' violent ejection from his brother's presence, and the abandonment of the Italian project. When, therefore, the Emperor, with Joséphine, left France, that he might be crowned in person at Milan, the arrangements for the government of his new kingdom were undetermined. By June the question had been decided ; Eugène de Beauharnais was named Viceroy of Italy.

To Hortense the news of this fresh mark of the Emperor's favour brought a gleam of brightness into an existence rapidly becoming a grey monochrome. During the excitement and constant festivities of the winter there can have been scanty leisure for thought

or reflection. But alone with her husband and her little children at Saint-Leu, where the spring was chiefly spent, it was another matter. In the comparative solitude of her country home, and in the absence of the court, she had time to look life in the face and to take her soundings. A letter written by Madame de Rémusat to her husband in Italy, after a visit to Saint-Leu, gives some indication of the spirit in which Hortense was learning to accept the inevitable.

Her friend had reported to her all that de Rémusat, who had accompanied the court to Milan, had said of Eugène, his sister being the more gratified by the favourable accounts thus transmitted because others of a less satisfactory nature had reached her. "Her soul is pure from all ambition," wrote her guest; "but her heart suffers by reason of the risks and perils to which her brother is exposed in the rank he has attained. She talked to me very reasonably of the drawbacks and the enjoyments attaching to her position. Although at the age of illusions, she appears to indulge in none; and to weigh gravely—and perhaps too dispassionately—the pleasures that may yet be met with on the pathway—a little thorny—of life."¹

Louis' lessons were taking effect, and Hortense, at twenty-two, was learning, as he had learnt, to build no castles in the air. A description belonging to this period and to be found in the same writer's memoirs gives a more painful impression of the girl who,

¹ *Lettres de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 148.

four years before, had been the ringleader of the Malmaison revels. Lonely and sick, ever fearful lest a word displeasing to her husband should escape her, she neither dared, said Madame de Rémusat, to rejoice over her brother's good fortune nor to deplore the indefinite prospect of separation involved. She wrote few letters, believing that her correspondence was not safe from inspection.

Her belief was not without excuse. In his morbid condition of mind nothing was so trivial as to be viewed by Louis with indifference; and if Mademoiselle Avrillon, lately attached to the Imperial household, is to be credited, his system of espionage was extended even to a favourite maid of his wife's, who had served her before her marriage, and whom he caused to be shadowed when she left the house, lest she might be charged with some secret mission.¹ Mademoiselle Avrillon supplies a portrait of Hortense as she appeared at this date to one unacquainted with her in her earlier, happier days. There is the same gentleness of expression, the same beautiful hair; the skin has still the extreme whiteness which was always one of its beauties; the old grace is noted, but added to it was an air of languor stated by her mother, watching her with a sore heart, to be new.²

Yet, whatever sympathy may be felt for Hortense, there can be no doubt that Louis, with his faculty of self-torture and enclosed in an atmosphere of gloom

¹ *Mémoires de Mademoiselle Avrillon*, t. i. p. 149.

² *Ibid.* t. i. pp. 150-2.

and suspicion, called for a greater degree of compassion. There is something specially pitiful about him, so young and so unhappy, his life crowded with possibilities gone to waste. At twenty-six, he was a Prince of the Empire, loaded with offices and dignities ; and lately, in spite of the offence he had given to his brother, he had been offered the Governor-Generalship of the Trans-Alpine Departments. He was a soldier who had gathered his laurels, and left it in no man's power—notwithstanding his dislike for the military trade—to question his courage ; a scholar, keenly interested in his studies. However limited his affections might be, he had friends to whom he was passionately attached. As a father, he was to show, when his little son, all too soon, was taken from him, how greatly he had loved him. His surroundings were to his taste ; and during this spring he found his chief interest in adorning and embellishing his recently acquired estate. But with, as it might seem, all that man could desire, one gift had been withheld—that of health ; and disease, physical and mental, had sapped every power of enjoyment, poisoned every pleasure. In spite of physicians and their remedies, the enemy was gaining upon him steadily. One cure after another was tried in vain, till it is no wonder that despair was laying hold upon him.

If his wife had loved him, sick and suffering as he was, he might have kept the bitter melancholy which was a part of his disorder at bay. But knowing he

was unloved, he had surrendered at discretion, a sullen victim.

Madame Campan, with her invincible cheerfulness, persisted in colouring the existence of the unhappy couple by her wishes and her hopes. Her correspondence with Hortense was carried on, affectionate as ever, though modified in tone by the rank acquired by her former pupil—she was not of those who fall into the error of presuming upon past familiarity; and at present she was full of the gratification afforded her by a visit to Saint-Leu.

“I carried away,” she wrote, “the sweetest remembrance of your manner of life—dignity without pomp, a severe correctness without affectation, gaiety, kindness—all is perfect; and to the honour of the Prince and of my beloved pupil.” In Louis she had discovered fresh attractions. “I was charmed with him during my stay. Never have I seen youth afflicted by such grievous sufferings endure them with more gentleness and resignation. . . . His Highness would not believe how much he touched and interested me.”

By the beginning of July and a few days before the return of the Court to Paris, the Prince and Princess had left Saint-Leu, with the double object of trying a new cure, in the mud-baths of Saint-Amand, for the invalid, and of giving him the opportunity of attending to military duties in that quarter. The disappointment to Joséphine was great, and she wrote from Fontainebleau in deep dejection.

“I am very sorrowful,” she told Hortense, “at my

separation from your brother. I hoped, returning to France, to find my dear daughter. This was my consolation. But my life is spent in sadness, ever at a distance from those I love."

The affection of the Beauharnais for each other was indeed true and strong. When the great news of her brother's elevation to a vicarious kingship had reached Hortense, she had wept, owning that, though her first thought on receiving it had been of the goodness shown by the Emperor to both herself and Eugène, her second had been of grief at the separation entailed ;¹ and at Milan there had been sore trouble when the time for the parting of mother and son approached. Joséphine might have her dreams, but she proved by the passionate grief she showed in the parting from Eugène that ambition was subordinated to love for her children. Her tears and lamentations ended by rousing in Napoleon a certain degree of good-humoured irritation.

"You are crying, Joséphine," he said to her once. "It is not common sense. You are weeping at being separated from your son. If the absence of your children occasions you so much sorrow, think what I must feel. The affection you show them makes me cruelly conscious of the misfortune of possessing none."²

Had the Emperor intended to put a final stop to his wife's manifestations of grief, he had chosen an

¹ *Lettres de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 181.

² *Mémoires de Mademoiselle Avrillon*, t. i. p. 197.

ingenious method of doing so ; but if she shed no more tears in his presence, his words had not been calculated to reassure her as to her future, and an ever-present sense of danger may have led her to cling the more closely to the two from whom no motives of policy or expediency could divide her.

Nor was Eugène, left alone in his grandeur—his royalty rather one of shadow than of substance, since the Emperor continued to keep a careful supervision over his stewardship—any less lonely.

“He regrets very much,” wrote Joséphine to Hortense, “being separated from his mother and his tender sister. Alas ! there must be those who envy his lot, and believe him to be very happy. They do not read his heart ! In writing to you I had not intended to infect you with my sadness, but only to speak of my love for you and your little ones ; and to say how happy it has made me to have your son Louis with me since my return. The Emperor sent for him as soon as he arrived at Fontainebleau, without telling me what he had done. This attention of his touched me greatly. He knew that I had need of seeing another you—a charming little being you had created.” After which she proceeds, not unnecessarily, to set at rest any anxieties the mother may feel by assuring her that the baby only eats what is given him by his nurse, and is never present at meals. Otherwise, no doubt, the affection of the Emperor—who caressed little Louis very much—might be considered a source of danger.

Hortense was to have a week's interlude in the middle of her residence at Saint-Amand. In August Napoleon had gone to inspect the camp at Boulogne, followed by his sister Caroline, always anxious for prominence and attention. Writing to Louis, the Emperor suggested that he and his wife, with the elder child, who had accompanied them to Saint-Amand, should pay him a visit at the camp ; and though Louis, unwilling to interrupt his cure, declined the invitation, he permitted Hortense, with M. Petit Chou, as her little son was called by the household, to accept it for a week. Lodging with the Murats in a house they occupied near the Emperor's residence, the guests dined with him every night ; and by day all manner of amusements were provided in honour of Napoleon's step-daughter. The military tributes, she confesses, delighted her. "Of all honours that can be paid to a woman," she afterwards wrote, "those rendered by soldiers have always something chivalrous by which it is difficult not to be flattered." It was the single occasion, she added, when such matters had made an impression upon her.

The stay at Boulogne was not without its warlike excitement. Every one was in ignorance of the Emperor's real intentions, and an engagement between his troops and the English fleet anchored close at hand was considered possible. Taken to Ambleteuse in the Admiral's yacht, Hortense passed so close to the enemy's vessels, that—in her own estimation—the boat might have been captured ; and on another occasion when shots were fired by the English cannon,

the Princess, with little Napoleon, was placed between two fires. "My son," says Hortense, "was not at all frightened, which pleased his uncle very much." The child was, indeed, not the least welcome of the Emperor's guests; and in reviewing his troops he was sometimes to be seen with his nephew in his arms. A visit was also paid to the friendly Dutch fleet, near at hand, under Admiral Verhuell. "They received me," wrote Hortense, "with great hurrahs, and were as far as I was from suspecting that, a year later, I should be their Queen."

Thus, crowded with varied interest, the days passed all too quickly. "The week allowed by my husband having expired," said the Princess, "I took leave of the Emperor," to go back to Saint-Amand and to her domestic duties.¹

Before his return to the capital in September, Louis had learnt his appointment to the post of Governor of Paris, the more important as he would be left in charge of the city during Napoleon's absence in the approaching campaign. Though gratified at the honour done him, he was torn by doubts as to his physical capacity to perform the duties attaching to the office.

"How happy I should be were I well," he exclaimed in a letter to Lavallette. "Health apart, I feel the courage to fill a place where courage, zeal, and goodwill alone are necessary."

By the middle of September, the Imperial family

¹ *La Reine Hortense en Italie, en France et en Angleterre*, pp. 246-55.

were reunited, pending the Emperor's departure; Hortensé and her mother were once more together, and little Napoleon, as usual, the centre of attraction. "The Empress," wrote Madame de Rémusat to her husband, "is enchanted with her grandson, who behaved in the most friendly manner in the world to his uncle. The child is really *gentil*; he talks, and says pretty things, without seeming to have been taught them. He inherits the kindliness of his mother, whose praises I could not too often repeat. She seems to me to gain daily new wisdom and grace. With an entire simplicity of manner she combines perfect dignity, adding to the most enlightened intelligence a never-failing indulgence." The reunion of mother and daughter had been marked, the lady-in-waiting wrote, by a real and heartfelt rejoicing, "rare in the land where they have their dwelling, and perhaps also in a lower sphere."¹

Barely a fortnight after Hortense's return to Paris her stepfather quitted it, to take command of the army assembled on the left bank of the Rhine and to inaugurate the short campaign closed by the victory of Austerlitz. Joséphine had been permitted to accompany her husband as far as Strasbourg. Louis was left in charge of the military arrangements of the capital, and his wife was enjoined, by constant entertainments, to offer a substitute for the absent Court.

At this time, as M. Masson points out,² Napoleon

¹ *Lettres de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. pp. 247-8, 257-8.

² *Napoléon et sa famille*, t. iii. p. 131.

appears to have felt one of those recrudescences of his old tenderness which Joséphine must have hailed as delivering her, for the moment, from her worst fears. "I have not often news of you," he had written in August, when she had returned once more to Plombières. "You are forgetful of your friends. It is not well. I did not know that the waters of Plombières possessed the virtue of those of Lethe. It seems to me that in drinking those waters you say, 'Ah, if I die, who will love him?' That is a long way off, is it not? All ends—beauty, intelligence, feeling, even the sun; but what will never have an end is all the good I wish, the happiness of enjoying it, and the kindness of my Joséphine."¹

For the Empress and for those remaining in Paris alike, it was a time of anxiety, notwithstanding the universal confidence placed in the Emperor and the good fortune hitherto attending him. But whether anxious or confident, it was necessary to do his bidding, and, although *ennuyée* at the necessity of entertaining two hundred guests every Monday, Hortense carried out his wishes. Her part was played with her accustomed grace, and her guests had no suspicion of the sentiments of their pleasant and courteous hostess.²

It was not long before news of the first triumphs of the French arms reached the capital, with the inevitable accompaniment of their tale of private losses.

¹ *Napoléon et sa famille*, t. iii, p. 132. M. Masson suggests that the difficulty in deciphering some words may explain a certain incoherence.

² *Lettres de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i, p. 308.

In Hortense regret for the dead struggled for mastery with the joy of victory. "Reading of them," she said, speaking of battles won, "I am surprised that I am inclined to weep, though I am so much pleased at all these successes."¹ More to her taste than the formal entertainments incumbent upon the wife of the Governor of Paris were gatherings of her intimate friends, at one of which Prince Louis is mentioned as present, when the evening passed in talk. She had the talent of making her salon a centre of pleasant intercourse. But by the end of October a shadow had fallen upon the capital. News from the army was lacking, and dim apprehensions of disaster were felt. It was again in the rue Cérutti that, with heavy hearts, those oppressed with anxiety met. "Every evening," wrote Madame de Rémusat, "we go to the house of the Princesse Louis. There we wait with her. At eleven comes the courier, but without news. We look at each other sadly, and say adieu without venturing to speak."²

The suspense was not prolonged. Tidings of fresh successes quickly relieved it; and by the second week in December the rejoicings over the decisive victory of Austerlitz were taking place in Paris. Summoned to the rue Cérutti, Madame de Rémusat there heard the great news.

"He commanded in person," cried Hortense, between laughter and tears, "and has completely defeated the two Emperors."³

¹ *Lettres de Madame de Rémusat*, t. i. p. 324.

² *Ibid.* t. i. pp. 332-3.

³ *Ibid.* t. i. p. 388.

Paris went mad with joy. Repairing to the theatres, where the bulletins from the seat of war were read aloud, Hortense watched their reception by the applauding crowds. More and more Napoleon was the idol of the populace.

At the time of the battle of Austerlitz Louis Bonaparte had not been with his wife. In accordance with orders received from his brother, he had gone to the north, there to attend to military arrangements, and had subsequently visited—also at the Emperor's desire—the Low Countries. Notwithstanding other preoccupations, Napoleon was full of designs for the advancement of his family ; and it was now that indications became first apparent of his plans with regard to his brother and the crown of Holland. It was probably with a view to their furtherance that he had sent Louis thither, although nothing definite was yet in question. Napoleon's busy brain was also full of other schemes, and one of these was carried into effect before his return to Paris.

Conscious of his position as a self-made Sovereign, he was the more anxious to vindicate his claim to a place amongst the crowned heads of Europe by forming alliances with older dynasties. Difficulties were in the way. Every one of his brothers and sisters had contracted marriages in their former sphere of life ; and though Jérôme was consenting reluctantly to put away his American bride, no Bonaparte was available for the purpose the Emperor had in view. Eugène de Beauharnais, however, was free from any tie, and

his stepfather had determined to obtain for him as a wife the daughter of the Elector of Bavaria.

It was true that the affections of the Princess Augusta were bestowed upon another suitor, but such details were nil in Napoleon's eyes ; and by Christmas Day he had prevailed, and the Elector was writing to urge the match upon his daughter in a strain which made it difficult for her to refuse to accede to his wishes. A modern Iphigenia, she accordingly sacrificed her inclinations to her father and her country, and on the day following his arrival at Munich, the short campaign over, Napoleon was able to inform his stepson—who appears to have been allowed as little voice in the matter as the bride—that the affair was arranged. To Hortense he likewise personally communicated the news of her brother's marriage, adding a description of the Viceroy's betrothed. She was, he said, tall and beautiful, full of good qualities, and Hortense would have a sister altogether worthy of her.

It had been hoped that she would be present at the wedding ; Louis, however, wrote from Nimeguen to forbid the journey, and his wife, with added bitterness at her heart, had no choice but to obey. In communicating her husband's prohibition to her mother, she made no secret of her sentiments. It is plain that Joséphine fully shared them. "I conceive all the regret you feel," wrote the Empress, "at not coming to join us at Munich ; nor am I surprised at the grief caused you by your husband's letter on the subject." The marriage was to have been solemnised in Paris, and

Hortense would then have seen her brother and made acquaintance with his bride ; but this consolation was also to be denied her. With the eager precipitation customary with him in affairs of the kind, Napoleon summoned his stepson to Munich forthwith, and there, within a few days, the wedding was celebrated.

The meeting between mother and son was a joyful one, only alloyed by the fact that, on Eugène's arrival, early in the morning and before the Empress had risen, his stepfather had lost no time in hurrying him, travel-stained as he was, into the presence of his seventeen-year-old bride—a mode of procedure to which Joséphine took strong exception. On awakening, she learnt what had been done, and had melted, as usual, into tears—caused by the reflection that she had not been the first to kiss her son—when Napoleon entered, in his gayest mood, pushing the traveller before him.

“ *Tenez,*” he said, “ here is your great booby of a son whom I am bringing you.”

Joséphine was not at once to be pacified. How could the Emperor, she asked reproachfully, and with the emotion following upon weeping, have presented Eugène to his betrothed without allowing his mother first to see him ? The Prince was wearing a moustache, she further complained, whereas he was much better-looking without one. Why had he been introduced before having had it cut off, and without having even been given time to perform his toilette ? Still good-



PRINCESS MARIE DE BAVARIA, WIFE OF EUGENE BEAUHARNAIS.

humoured, Napoleon made his excuses for having neglected matters of so much importance ; the objectionable moustache was sacrificed before the day was over, and Eugène, paying as assiduous a court to his bride as if she were not already won, found no difficulty in effacing from her heart the remembrance of his rival.¹ Gratified at the success of his scheme, Napoleon testified his satisfaction by conferring upon his stepson a crowning mark of his favour, and when the marriage was celebrated, it was as Eugène Napoléon de France, adopted son of the Emperor—though not possessing the rights of inheritance—that Hortense's brother became the husband of the woman who was to prove so faithful and devoted a wife.

Hortense must have looked wistfully on from a distance at the family meeting in Munich. Yet she had not, especially in the absence of her husband, been destitute of compensations. Precluded during his visit to the north from continuing the course of more or less official entertainments enjoined upon her by the Emperor, she was relieved from duties for which she had little liking, and had the more leisure to devote to her favourite occupations. Her friends, gathering round her in the evenings, amused themselves now with music, now with the production of improvised sketches. It was a pleasant and harmless fashion of passing the time, but Hortense was unfortunately a Princess ; the members of her household were chiefly young, and in the ease and intimacy prevailing at the

¹ *Mémoires de Mademoiselle Avrillon*, t. i. pp. 301, 303.

rue Cérutti, there were not wanting critics who saw a lack of that dignity demanded by her rank.¹

Others found more to complain of, and General Ricard, whether speaking from personal observation or from report, asserts that her preference was given in a marked degree to the society and conversation of men, and that, whilst her masculine guests came away from her house "charmed and almost in love, women were humiliated and irritated."² It is a serious charge, denoting, were it true, a want of courtesy and good breeding specially inconsistent with the witness borne by others. That Hortense should have found more pleasure in the companionship of men than of women is not unlikely, nor can it be fairly made a matter of reproach. That in her salon women were habitually slighted is difficult to believe in the face of the life-long friendships she maintained with women associates, such as Madame de Rémusat, the wife of Marshal Ney, Madame d'Abrantès, Madame Récamier and others, and the tributes they have paid to her unvarying gentleness and consideration. Who, one is tempted to inquire, was the friend of the General's who had not been made welcome at the house of the Princesse Louis, and whose debt he sought to pay by his sweeping assertion?

The year ended, at least outwardly, gaily. On New Year's Eve the two little Princes received their friends. There were marionettes, a lottery of toys, and all

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii. p. 253.

² *Autour des Bonapartes* (Ricard).

manner of diversions. Charles de Rémusat was amongst the guests, and, having been schooled by his mother, who feared that, conscious of superiority in point of age, her son might not comprehend the pre-eminence of the baby princes, set the maternal apprehensions at rest by an air of mingled respect and ease which much became him.

Thus, with the laughter of children, the year 1805 was brought to a close.

CHAPTER X

1806

Domestic unhappiness—Hortense's amusements—Stéphanie de Beauharnais and her marriage—Napoleon and Eugène—Louis' discontent—Accepted by Holland as King—Napoleon Charles—Departure for Holland.

WHEN the Emperor returned to Paris he brought Louis Bonaparte with him. He had, indeed, no alternative but to do so. It had been his intention that his brother, by remaining in Holland, should have gained a foothold in the country and paved the way for the execution of the plan already maturing for placing him upon the throne. Louis, however, either through misapprehension of the instructions he had received or by a deliberate disregard of them, had quitted the Low Countries ; and when Napoleon arrived at Strasbourg, after leaving Munich, he found his brother awaiting him there. His displeasure was openly expressed.

“ Why did you leave Holland ? ” he asked ; “ they liked to see you there. You should have remained.”

Louis had many plausible reasons to allege in his excuse. His duties, he pointed out, recalled him to the capital, where he held the supreme military command.

But he did not deny that other motives had helped to determine his conduct, and that certain rumours afloat in Holland had contributed to hasten his departure. "Those rumours," he represents himself as having added loftily, "are not agreeable to that free nation, nor are they any more pleasing to me."

It was not to be expected that the Emperor would be moved a hair's breadth from his purpose by his brother's views and preferences; but the future of Holland had not yet become a practical question, and for the present there was nothing to be done but to permit Louis to return to Paris in the Imperial train. Following the Court thither, he was therefore present at the welcome accorded to the victor of Austerlitz.

It would have been to his wife's advantage had Louis obeyed the Emperor's behests and remained in Holland. The interlude of freedom she had enjoyed during his absence had perhaps indisposed her to accept with patience his resumption of the reins of government; and, at the end of her powers of endurance, it was at this time that she appears to have broken the rule of silence she had hitherto observed as to the intolerable conditions attaching to her mode of life.¹ Questioned by her mother, Hortense first entreated her to refrain from intervention in domestic matters; but upon Joséphine pressing her inquiries she yielded; and, the barrier of

¹ Hortense's causes of complaint appear to have rested at this time upon more serious grounds than mere incompatibility of temper. See Madame de Rémusat's *Mémoires* of this year.

reserve once broken down, the temptation to pour out her griefs proved too strong to be resisted, and she allowed the Empress to gain a fuller insight than before into the species of petty tyranny of which she was the victim. Joséphine, in her turn, reported her daughter's grievances to the Emperor, who did not fail to express his opinion of his brother's conduct. The result was what might have been anticipated. Indignant at his wife's disclosures and exasperated at what he justly considered to be intermeddling in his private affairs, Louis replied coldly that, if his household was to be made the subject of interference, he should take the step of quitting France ; and Napoleon, helpless and defeated, could do no more than counsel patience to the unfortunate wife.¹

In a letter he addressed to his brother a year later the Emperor made plain the attitude he had taken up.

"You treat a young woman," he told Louis, "as one would treat a regiment. You have the best and most virtuous of wives, and you make her unhappy. Let her dance as much as she wishes ; it is natural at her age. I have a wife of forty, and writing to her from the field of battle I bid her go to balls. And you wish a wife of twenty, who sees her life slipping by, who has all her illusions, to live in a cloister, to spend her days like a nurse, always engaged in washing her child. . . . I should not say all this did I not feel an interest in you. Render the mother of your children happy. There is only one way. It is to show her

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. ii. pp. 304-7.

much esteem and confidence. Unhappily, you have too good a wife. If you had one who was *coquette*, she would lead you by the nose. But your wife is proud ; the very idea that you can entertain a bad opinion of her grieves and revolts her. You should have had one of the wives I know in Paris. She would have played you false and have kept you at her knees.”¹

Some reprimand of this kind, adapted to the special occasion, Napoleon may have given his brother in the spring of 1806. But Louis, in his obstinate and sombre isolation, was not likely to believe him ; and affairs went on as before, Hortense leading her accustomed life, and making the most of the pleasures it permitted. She was now a rich woman, and spent her money freely. Her dresses, almost always white, were made costly by embroidery ; her purchases of gems were on so large a scale as to suggest the possibility that she saw in them an investment for her superfluous income.² Going seldom into society, and rarely to be seen at balls or at the play, she spent her time with her old associates ; took lessons in music and drawing, and was beginning to exercise the art of composition. Louis, looking on, disapproved. “ Her gaiety is, in his eyes, a crime ; her childishnesses are plots. All that is best in her is a fresh injury to him ; her good faith always placed in doubt, her uprightness constantly questioned ; her filial respect and her sisterly love turned into a crime.”³

¹ *Correspondance de Napoléon I.*, t. xv, p. 25.

² *Napoléon et sa famille*, t. iii, p. 296.

³ *Ibid.* t. iii, p. 299.

Such is the description furnished by M. Masson. Other critics have been less indulgent. Hortense's pastimes have been harshly judged; she has been blamed and ridiculed for the remnants of childhood clinging about her; for the world of unconsidered laughter and trivial diversions in which she continued at times to take refuge; she has been charged, doubtless justly, with forgetfulness of the part of Princess and of great lady that she had been set to play. It may all be true, and yet forgivable. She was still young—not more than twenty-two. It seems necessary to emphasise this fact again and again, lest the reader should overlook it, and should forget that the time of maturity varies, and that some women, with their babies in their arms, are no more than older children. That it was so with Hortense in a measure throughout her life is evident.

Writing of her with affectionate enthusiasm in a letter to her husband some six years later, Madame de Rémusat adds that she is working seriously with her children's tutor, with the apparent desire to supply what had been wanting in her education. "I wish," her friend observed, "that her studies were directed by some one more enlightened. There is an age when one should rather learn in order to think than in order to know; and history should not be taught to a pupil of twenty-five as to one of ten."¹ The criticism points to a want in the scholar as well as in the teacher, and it may have extended to other matters besides history.

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. ii, p. 254.

In the course of the spring the Court was enlivened by the festivities attending the marriage of Stéphanie de Beauharnais to the hereditary Prince of Baden. Trained, like every one else, by Madame Campan, she was withdrawn from Saint-Germain at sixteen, to be suddenly raised to the rank of an adopted daughter of the Emperor. By this time the Courts of Europe were competing for the honour of an alliance with the Bonapartes, or, when no one of the Emperor's blood was available, with those connected with him by marriage. The authorities at Baden would have preferred Joséphine's creole niece, brought from Martinique, to be educated in Paris. But the Empress had decided that she was, as yet, too young and delicate, and the suitor had to be content with Mademoiselle de Beauharnais.

Mademoiselle de Beauharnais herself was far from content. Napoleon, taking a favourable view of the match, reported to Eugène that his cousin and the Prince of Baden "s'aiment assez." What he considered enough remains doubtful, but on Stéphanie's part there seems to have been little affection. Her head was turned by her new honours, and, declaring that the Emperor's adopted daughter might have looked for a husband amongst kings and the sons of kings, she was strangely inclined to regard her marriage in the light of a *mésalliance*, finding her German bridegroom destitute of any compensating personal attraction. Nor was Napoleon's conduct calculated to render the bride better satisfied with her lot. He had conceived an

unfortunate and exaggerated liking for the pretty child, fresh from school and indulging in a species of hero-worship for himself. "Je l'adorais," she would say in after-years,¹ and innocent though her adoration was, the response it elicited from the Emperor was sufficiently marked to cause disquiet to his wife and indignation to the rest of his family. It was not astonishing that the singular honours conferred upon Stéphanie—she was given precedence of his sisters, and even of *Madame Mère*, his mother—should have been viewed with jealousy, and, under the circumstances, there were few who desired that her residence at Saint-Cloud should be prolonged. On April 8 the marriage was celebrated with great magnificence. Hortense—covered with turquoises set in diamonds—taking her share in the proceedings, meditated, it may be, upon the future in store for another victim of statecraft. The bride was conducted to and from the altar by the Emperor ; and though, unversed in the etiquette proper to the occasion, he was in a difficulty whether to offer her his right hand or his left, Stéphanie had fortunately been better instructed in her part, was not too much embarrassed to set him right, and all went well. Nor were the festivities concluded with the marriage-day. After a fortnight passed at Malmaison and Saint-Cloud, the Court returned to Paris, where a splendid entertainment was given to two thousand five hundred guests, and Hortense led a white quadrille, when the flowers worn by the women and the corre-

¹ *Madame Louis Bonaparte* (d'Arjuzon).

sponding scarves of their partners lent the only touches of colour to the dancers' dresses.

By all, with the exception of the bride, it must have been felt that sufficient importance had been accorded to the marriage of even an adopted daughter of the Emperor, and relief will have been general when she was reluctantly compelled to accompany her husband to Baden. From that place of exile she continued to remind Napoleon of her existence in letters whose tone is an indication of the relations that had been established between the two.

"Sire," she wrote in July, "every day, when I am alone, I think of you, of the Empress, of all dearest to me. I transport myself to France, believe that I am near you, and find pleasure in my grief itself. Your Majesty will pardon me the liberty I take in telling you all my thoughts; but you have permitted me to do so. Your kindness reassures me, and causes me to count upon your indulgence. Deign to accept the homage of the profoundest respect from your tender daughter, Stéphanie Napoléon."¹

Although the German bridegroom can scarcely have been wholly blind to a condition of things so unflattering to his self-love, he had apparently made up his mind that, given a certain time, and when the sobering influence of years had done its work, all would be well. Before leaving France he visited his wife's former schoolmistress, and gave her a gratifying assurance of his content. "I am better satisfied

¹ Jung, *Mémoires de Lucien Bonaparte*, t. iii. p. 444.

with the Princess every day," he said, "and I wished, madame, to tell you so. She has true principles of virtue, piety, and modesty, with infinite intelligence, and in four years will be in all respects a charming Princess." The confidence expressed did credit to the Grand Duke's estimate of character, for there can have been little hitherto to encourage it. But though it was not at once that his patience was rewarded, he proved in the sequel to have won a prize in the marriage lottery ; and in days to come, when his connection with the fallen Emperor was a cause of reproach, no less than in more halcyon times, he adhered with steadfast loyalty to a wife passionately true to the traditions of her girlhood.

Before the grand-ducal couple had left France it is possible that Napoleon was beginning to be sensible of a lack of dignity in his recent infatuation. At the very time that it was a source of annoyance to his wife, he had been testifying a wise and kindly interest in her son's domestic arrangements, and the counsels he bestowed upon the Viceroy display him in an unusually agreeable light.

"My son," he wrote, "you work too much ; your life is too monotonous. For yourself this is well, for work should be a recreation. But you have a young wife, who is with child. You should arrange, I think, to spend the evenings with her, and create a little society around you. Why do you not go to the play—to the royal box—once a week ? I think you should also have a small hunting *équipage*, so that

you should be able to hunt at least once weekly. You must have more gaiety in your house ; it is necessary for your wife's happiness and your own. It can be done with little loss of time. I lead the life you do ; but I have an older wife, to whose amusement I am not necessary. . . . A young woman requires diversion. You used to care enough for pleasure. You must re-acquire the taste."

The letter is an example of the minute care, extending to every detail, taken by Napoleon to ensure the success of a union for which he rightly considered himself responsible. If Hortense's marriage had proved a failure, he was determined that, so far as in him lay, he would prevent a like result in her brother's case. But it is curious that amidst his manifold avocations and anxieties he should have found leisure to devote to the purpose.

Almost every one of his family had, at this time, been engaging his attention ; and the spring had been fruitful in changes. The Duchies of Clèves and Berg had been conferred upon Murat, now Prince Joachim, Caroline—soon to be raised to the rank of Grand Duchess—thus obtaining an independent position and estates where she would enjoy undisputed supremacy. Her eldest sister, Elisa, weighted with the incapable Bacciochi, had become, during the previous year, Princesse de Piombino. The principality of Guastalla had been given to Pauline. Joseph had consented to reign at Naples. If Louis still remained at Paris or Saint-Leu, filling his office of Constable,

and occupied with the care of his health and with the watch and ward he never failed to keep over his wife, Napoleon's intentions with regard to him were an open secret. It was not till June that the future of the couple was fixed ; but rumours concerning their destination had been for some time afloat, and Madame Campan was writing that her thoughts were full of a subject occupying all Europe, but to which she dared not more explicitly allude.

Whilst Napoleon was busily securing for his brother a throne, it is instructive to read the account of his condition and of the treatment he received, supplied by the King-designate. "His existence," he wrote of himself (in the third person), "was growing daily more intolerable in France. Without a home, without peace, silent at the council board, without military employment . . . bearing upon him the ostensible marks of disfavour, and few persons venturing to visit him, he was in a state of *gêne* and of *spasme moral* which he would have been unable to endure longer."

Such was the bitter complaint of the richly endowed Prince, of the Constable of France, of the Colonel-General, Grand Officer of the Empire, member of the Privy Council, of the Senate, and of the Council of State. It is useful to bear in mind his honest conviction of the neglect shown him by his brother, in the face of the benefits and honours with which he had been heaped ; since the same morbid disposition to take offence may be credited with at least a part of the grievances he cherished against his wife.



Engraving by R. Smith after a picture by the artist of Carlevar.

LOUIS NAPOLEON, KING OF HOLLAND.

Meantime, Napoleon had made it clear to Holland that her choice lay between the two alternatives of annexation or of accepting a ruler at his hands. Of the two she preferred the latter, and Louis was presented to her as her King. The differences of opinion prevailing in the Low Countries, the history of the Dutch deputation and of their negotiations with the Emperor, and the terms they strove to make, belong rather to a life of Louis than to that of his wife. By June all was finally settled. On the 5th of that month the Dutch envoys waited upon the Emperor, and announced that after mature deliberation it had been recognised at the Hague that a constitutional monarchy was the sole form of government practical henceforth, being in harmony with the principles spread throughout Europe. In order to consolidate such a monarchy, they asked that Prince Louis Napoleon should become its founder. Napoleon made answer, concurring in the views thus formulated ; and, turning to his brother, commended to him the nation with whose destiny he was to be entrusted. When Louis, in his turn, had replied, the doors communicating with the apartments where the Court was assembled were thrown open and the new King of Holland announced.¹ The scene, observes Madame de Rémusat, was very well played.

According to Louis' statement—his accounts of the course of events do not invariably tally with the facts—he accepted the charge thus laid upon

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii. p. 31.

him with reluctance. It may have been real. He regarded responsibility with the dread of a scrupulously conscientious man, and may have foreseen the possibility that his duty to his new country might clash with the obedience required by his brother. But resistance to the Emperor's fiat, face to face and in cold blood, would have implied a strength of mind he did not possess, and, as in the case of his marriage, he surrendered to Napoleon's will.

Of Hortense's sentiments there can be less doubt. It is true that one of her biographers refuses to believe that her new dignity was unwelcome. "However much," he declares, "she pretended modesty and absence of ambition, she was infinitely flattered at becoming a Queen."¹ Proof of the assertion is not forthcoming, and what evidence there is points in an opposite direction. She is quoted as declaring that she would have preferred the throne of Naples. The south, its beauty, its climate, the artistic tradition belonging to Italy, the comparative proximity of her brother, would all, in this case, have reconciled her to expatriation. Holland offered no compensations; and absence from France and from her mother, a virtual exile shared by the husband she did not love, must have presented a prospect full of gloom.

When the days of association and companionship are numbered they gain in charm; and notwithstanding present troubles, impending separation, and the anxious forebodings concerning Joséphine's future never wholly

¹ *La Reine Hortense* (Turquan), p. 108.

laid at rest, the past spring must have presented many pleasant pictures to Hortense as she looked back upon it—times of intimate family re-union when the victor of Austerlitz—perhaps—forgot to dream of fresh campaigns, of countries still awaiting conquest, and of peoples not yet subjugated. At such moments, in the records of the time, the little Napoleon, three and a half years old, played his customary prominent part. Now it is Madame Junot who describes the scene—in waiting on *Madame Mère*, she must often have been an eye-witness—or again the grave Minister of Police, Fouché, notes how the Emperor's hopes centre on the boy. "I recognise myself in that child," his master says, his eyes resting on the miniature Bonaparte face aureoled by the mother's fair hair, unsuspecting that in scarcely more than a year all anticipations founded upon the little heir will have crumbled into dust.

"How many times, on the terrace of Saint-Cloud, when the *déjeuner* was over," proceeds Fouché, "have I not seen him contemplate him with delight . . . and resting from the cares of empire, join in his childish games." "This child will be worthy of me—he may even surpass me," Napoleon would say, as he marked the boy's liking for the sound of the drum and for the signs of mimic warfare.¹

Or again—Madame Junot is the narrator—the scene is once more laid at Saint-Cloud. The boy is in his grandmother's arms whilst the Emperor tells

¹ Fouché's *Mémoires*, t. i. p. 377.

the well-known story of Casabianca. Slipping down from his place, he stands facing the speaker, gazing at him with great blue eyes.

“Is it true—what thou hast said?” he demands, climbing on to the Emperor’s knee, when the story is ended.

“Why dost thou wish to know?” returns Napoleon.

“Because,” answers the child, “I will pray God for that young boy and his *papa*.”

Lifting him, the Emperor kisses the speaker.

“Thou, too,” he says—“thou wilt be a brave and good child.”¹

Or yet again, permitted to lay his busy fingers upon any object he desires, he has taken possession of the Emperor’s hat and sword, has hung the sword round his neck, and marches, with baby solemnity, behind Napoleon as he paces up and down, the laughter of the great soldier being touched with emotion.²

Constant, the *valet de chambre*, dwells with the affectionate remembrance of an old servant upon the loving reverence shown by the child for his master, the patience and forbearance with which he bears the tests applied by Napoleon. “The Emperor would often take him on his knee during the *déjeuner*, amusing himself by making him eat lentils one by one. The red colour would mount to the child’s pretty face; vexation and impatience would be painted on his countenance; but his Majesty could prolong the

¹ *Mémoires de la Duchesse d'Abrantès*, t. vi. p. 346.

² *Ibid.*

game without any fear of his nephew growing angry, which with any other person he would not have failed to do." His father might make him the presents most fitted to gratify him ; he would always give the preference to his uncle's gifts.

"But look, Napoleon," Louis would say ; "those are ugly ; mine are prettier."

"No," the child would answer obstinately ; "they are *très bien*—my uncle gave me them."

"Will not you say 'good morning' to me ?" Murat once asked, stopping him as he was crossing the salon towards Napoleon.

"No," answered the child, freeing himself ; "no, not before my uncle, the Emperor."

When his shoemaker was to be paid in five-franc pieces, he made an indignant protest. Were the portraits of his uncle, he asked, to be put to so base a use ?¹

Each incident, carefully treasured in the memory of Napoleon's servant, goes to bear witness to the nature of the child's training, and especially to a veneration for the Emperor certainly not to be explained by the teaching of his father, and which must have been the result of his mother's influence. Long afterwards her youngest son remembered the same early lesson, inculcated upon him at a time when Napoleon was no longer the ruler of a large part of Europe. Fallen from his high estate and his cause a lost one, Louis Napoleon, at his mother's side, still "learned by

¹ *Mémoires de Constant*, t. iii. pp. 301-2.

heart the true story of Napoleon. It is undoubtedly to her," adds a man who knew him, "that must be ascribed in a very large measure the powerful impression the cause of Napoleon . . . made upon the young Prince. 'No one,' he used to say, 'ever succeeded in describing Napoleon so well as my mother.'"¹

The strong love between man and child was no mere family affection. It was a factor of importance in the fate of many. Had Napoleon Charles lived, it is not likely that his uncle would have taken measures to deprive him of his prospective heirship. Even Joseph Bonaparte was preparing to submit to the inevitable and to turn it to his advantage. Should it suit the Emperor's arrangements, he wrote to his wife about this time, in a letter intended for his brother's eye, to marry either of his daughters, Zenaide or Charlotte, to the boy, he would feel happy if, by the adoption of their nephew, the family affections should be centred upon him. Should he himself, as seemed likely, have no sons, what prouder fate could be his than, together with the Emperor, to concentrate their love upon the child who would thus have become also his?²

Joseph, in fact, had bowed to necessity, and was ready to make the best of it. With his eldest brother on his side, Napoleon would have been strengthened against opposition from the rest of the family. The little child—to quote Fouché, not, one imagines,

¹ *Memoirs of Dr. T. W. Evans*, vol. i. p. 39.
Les Rois Frères de Napoléon (du Casse), p. 15.

addicted to sentiment—was “the reed upon which a great man desired to lean.” It was soon to be broken. And in the meantime the tale of those happy meetings was told. The two Napoleons were to part for ever. One other picture, before that farewell was taken, remains sketched upon the canvas. On the day following the one when Louis had been invested with his sovereignty the Empress was breakfasting with her ladies, the new-made Queen being present, when the Emperor appeared, holding Napoleon by the hand.

“Here is a little boy,” he said gaily, “come to recite to you one of La Fontaine’s fables, which I have made him learn this morning.”

The fable in question was that of the Frogs who asked for a King. As the child declaimed it, the Emperor, standing behind his stepdaughter, laughed aloud.

“What do you say to that, Hortense?” he asked, when the performance was over.

Hortense said little. The jest may have struck her as ill-advised. Madame de Rémusat, not having the same reason to be heedful of Dutch susceptibilities, allowed a smile to appear as she proceeded with her breakfast, and, discouraged by his stepdaughter’s silence, Napoleon turned to the lady-in-waiting.

“I see,” he said, “that Madame de Rémusat thinks I am giving Napoleon a good education.”¹

The separation from his small human plaything must

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii, p. 34.

have cost the Emperor no little regret ; and Hortense's heart was heavy. "Madame Louis," says her friend, "did not see herself placed upon the throne without many tears." At the last moment the possibility seems to have occurred to her that, could his brother's consent be obtained, Louis might go unaccompanied to reign over his new subjects, and she opened her heart on this occasion to the man who stood to her in the place of a father. She confided her griefs, her fears for the future, to Napoleon ; begged his protection, and exacted from him the promise never to condemn her unheard ; going so far as to throw out a hint, in her shrinking from the prospect of isolated grief, that when she should have suffered enough, she would retire from the world into a convent, rather than confront what might lie before her.

The Emperor listened, probably not unmoved, to the passionate complaint of the child he had seen grow into womanhood. But for her ill there was no cure. He could only direct her to have courage and patience, promise her his support, and enjoin upon her to take no important step without consulting him. These were his commands, and Hortense had no alternative but to obey. But "I can bear witness that I saw this unhappy woman prepare to mount a throne like a victim surrendering herself to a fresh sacrifice."¹ On June 12 Hortense left Saint-Leu to accompany the new King to his dominions.

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii. p. 35.

CHAPTER XI

1806—1807

Journey to Holland—Royalty—Continued domestic friction—Aix-la-Chapelle, and Mayence—Return to the Hague—Napoleon Charles—Louis and the Emperor.

UPON the journey of the new sovereigns to their dominions, or upon their arrival in Holland, it is not necessary to linger. The welcome accorded by the Dutch to the ruler imposed upon them by the will of the man then acting as arbiter of nations was probably for the most part a mere official and politic display—a matter of making the best of the inevitable, and a propitiation offered to him who, for better or for worse, was to be their master. Whatever element of sincerity may have mingled with the demonstrations greeting Louis and his wife at the towns they visited on their way to the Hague, there is scarcely more to be said of them than of the uniforms devised by Louis for his household and officers of state. To Hortense's biographer the interest centres in the figure of the Queen, a figure having perhaps some affinity to that of the Queen of a Twelfth Night masque, or to the crowned and sceptred puppet of a marionette show—a character

necessarily shared with the rest of Napoleon's mushroom royalties. If Hortense was a puppet, she was a puppet of flesh and blood, very human, with a heart that throbbed, pulses that quickened, and, above all, tears that fell. Selected for her part without reference to her aptitude to play it, she was an exile, as lonely as a frightened child delivered into unfriendly keeping, and as impatient as a child of her suffering. "She once told me," says Madame de Rémusat, "that her life [in Holland] was so painful, appeared to her so denuded of any hope, that often, when staying at one of her country residences not far distant from the sea, and looking at the water dominated by the English vessels blockading the ports, she had ardently desired that chance should bring one amongst them to the coast, and that a descent might be made by which she should be taken prisoner."¹ For the present Holland was to be her place of captivity.

The new reign was inaugurated with a fair amount of success. The country was in a state when any change may have been welcomed. The Duc de Broglie, visiting it in the course of this year, describes its melancholy aspect. It was suffering from the general condition of Europe; the ports were deserted, industries paralysed, shops empty, storehouses closed, and grass was growing in the streets.² When the national life was at so low an ebb there can have

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii, p. 40.

² *Souvenirs* (Duc de Broglie).

been little to fear in a transition from one form of government to another, and though the sequel showed that the idea of a monarchy would be slow in taking root, the nation was, on the whole, disposed to acquiesce in the arrangement. Owing to prudence probably, on the part of Louis, and to the indifference born of profound discouragement on that of his wife, they had not sought, in taking possession of the palace, to make any alteration in their new abode calculated to alarm the economical spirit of the Dutch; and a favourable impression was produced by their manners and conduct. Hortense was, indeed, quickly on the way to acquire a degree of popularity said to have awakened her husband's jealousy; to have caused him to rescind the orders he had at first given that she should lay herself out to entertain his new subjects, and to evince, on the contrary, a desire to keep her for the future in the background.¹

For once Hortense was not inclined to resist. If she had felt a transient desire to play her part well it was easily discouraged, and it was probably without reluctance that she took the line of withdrawing into a narrow circle, confined for the most part to those members of her household who had been brought from France, relinquished her intention of winning the affection of the nation over which she was set, and turned once more to her favourite artistic interests and to the care of her sons. Even the love borne by

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii. p. 38.

husband and wife to their children proved a source of conflict, and the affection of Napoleon for his mother was viewed by Louis with a jealous eye. It is further stated that the system he had established in France was carried on at the Hague, that Hortense was constantly watched, the letters she wrote were opened, and her papers examined.

Such is the account given of the beginning of Hortense's life in Holland. It is said that Napoleon had indulged the hope that, in fresh surroundings and with new interests and duties, the relations of the two might have assumed a more friendly character. He was doomed to disappointment. Thrown upon one another's society in the species of exile they shared, it was to find life together more unendurable than before. At greater liberty to direct their actions according to their wishes than when conscious of the watchful eye of the Emperor, they fell naturally and inevitably apart, and, living under the same roof, remained, as far as might be, separate. Physical suffering enhanced the evils of the situation. Nervous and ill, Louis was not likely to be benefited by the climate of Holland, and Hortense was so plainly in failing health that the King did not withhold his consent when the physicians prescribed a trial of the waters of Aix-la-Chapelle. Never unwilling, for his part, to seek a fresh cure, he furthermore decided to accompany his wife, and thither, after scarcely a month spent in their new dominions, they repaired together.

Meantime, if Hortense looked back with longing

eyes to Paris, Joséphine, bereaved of both son and daughter, had been more than ever a prey to her habitual melancholy.

"Since you departed," she wrote to Hortense in the month of July, "I have been constantly suffering, sad and unhappy. Sickness has left me, but sorrow remains. How should it not be so, separated from a daughter such as you, tender, sweet, and pleasant, who made the charm of my life?" Looking on to the future, she expressed her hope that, in accordance with the promises of Hortense, Louis, and the Emperor, the winter at least would be spent together at Paris. How were her daughter's husband, her children? "Mon Dieu, que je suis triste de ne plus les voir quelque-fois!" Should Hortense at any time be ill, she must let her mother know without delay, and she would come to her.¹

When Joséphine wrote it is plain that she had no hope of any meeting before the winter at soonest. As it fell out, mother and daughter were to be together in the autumn. A fresh war was imminent, and, when Napoleon left Paris on September 25, his wife, overcoming his resistance at the very last moment and attended by a single waiting-woman, accompanied him to Mayence, to which place she was followed by the Court, and where she remained when he went, a week later, to place himself at the head of his troops. At Mayence she was shortly joined by Hortense, on leaving Aix-la-Chapelle; and the meeting

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. ii. p. 267.

must have gone some way to dispel the melancholy consequent on her parting with the Emperor.

Napoleon had taken leave of his wife with unwonted emotion, moved to the point of tears when the day of farewell arrived. But it is a truism to say that the pain of parting is more evanescent in the case of the traveller than of those he leaves behind; the excitement of coming battle will have quickly dissipated the great soldier's sadness, and a touch of kindly impatience is perceptible in the exhortations to cheerfulness he addressed both to Joséphine and to Hortense.

"I know not why you weep," he wrote to his wife not long after his own tearful leave-taking. "You are wrong to do yourself harm. Hortense has a little of the pedant about her—she loves to give advice. She has written to me, and I am answering her. She must be happy and gay. Courage and gaiety—that is the recipe."¹

It is a recipe not invariably easy to follow, and at the time that Napoleon's letter was written, anxiety as to the results of the campaign was still felt. Anxiety was aggravated in the case of the Empress by the fact that the atmosphere of her own court was far from being wholly sympathetic. Her ladies-in-waiting had, many of them, memories and associations attaching them to the older and more legitimate European dynasties, and in the Imperial household the anomalous spectacle was to be seen of an opposition formed

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i. pp. 177-8.

amongst its members, and making no attempt to disguise their political bias. For the woman whose all was staked on the fortunes of the war, the consciousness of a hostile spirit amongst her personal attendants must have introduced an element of discomfort and constraint, the harder to bear so long as the course of the war continued to be undetermined. The period of uncertainty was, however, not prolonged. Before the middle of October tidings of victory had arrived, and in her joy Joséphine will have overlooked old grudges.

In the Emperor's announcement of his successes, his wife's daughter and grandchildren were not forgotten. "If Hortense is at Mayence," he wrote, "give her a kiss, as well as to Napoleon, and to the little one;" and again, a day later: "A thousand messages to Hortense and to the great M. Napoleon."¹

Whatever had been the counsels offered by his stepdaughter in which the Emperor had detected signs of pedanticism, she appears to have acted upon those sent her by the Emperor. "She must be happy and gay," declared Napoleon; and gay and happy she accordingly was. Stéphanie de Beauharnais, the six months' bride, had also come to Mayence, no less glad than her cousin of the opportunity of leaving domestic cares behind; and though Court life, in the absence of the Emperor, was attended by a certain monotony, means of amusement were not lacking to those who sought them. That Hortense was not backward in this respect was admitted by the

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i. pp. 183, 184, 186.

faithful Madame de Rémusat. "Happy at escaping from her melancholy home, she filled her days with I know not what distractions, of a nature a little too childish for her position and rank. Like her mother, she was taking much pleasure in the happy dispositions displayed by her young son, then full of life and of beauty, and very forward for his age."¹

Other guests visited Mayence; German princes repaired thither to pay their respects to the wife of the Emperor; entertainments were given; attention was lavished upon toilettes; news all the time being eagerly awaited from the seat of war. Whilst Hortense was only too well content that her stay at Mayence should be indefinitely prolonged, the uncertainty was less welcome to those eager to return to the more congenial atmosphere of Paris; the Empress, for her part, was entreating permission to join her husband; and all were, as ever, dependent on the decree of the absent autocrat, whose letters reflect his wife's condition of nervous depression.

"Talleyrand has arrived," he wrote on November 6, "and tells me, *mon amie*, that you do nothing but weep. What is it that you want? You have your daughter, your grandchildren, and good tidings. Here is cause sufficient for happiness. I have received a letter from M. Napoleon. I think it is from Hortense, and not from him."²

As M. Napoleon was barely four, the surmise, in

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii. pp. 91-2.

² *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i. pp. 191-2.

spite of his precocity, was probably correct. Meanwhile, Joséphine's supplications were taking effect, and a fortnight later the question was under consideration whether she might not have her way and undertake the journey to Berlin she so much desired, Napoleon directing her to hold herself in readiness and to await further orders. Nor was Hortense to be left behind. Where the Emperor's will was in question he could be counted upon to over-ride any objections Louis might make, and she was to accompany her mother. "I shall be very glad," Napoleon wrote, with the ceremony he sometimes employed towards dignitaries of his own creation, "that the Queen of Holland should be of the journey." The instructions so anxiously expected did not arrive, and Joséphine was left at Mayence, to find such comfort as she could in the letters reaching her from Berlin, containing sentences well calculated to soothe her ever-recurrent misgivings and raise her drooping spirits. "There is only one woman for me," Napoleon wrote in December, under the influence of a mood of special tenderness. "Would you recognise her? . . . These nights are long—all alone."¹ "I see with pleasure," he wrote, ten days later, "that you are more gay, and that the Queen of Holland desires to come with you. I am impatient to give the orders ; but we must wait for some days."²

The anticipations thus raised were doomed to disappointment. It was decided that the season was

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i. p. 211.

² *Ibid.* t. i. pp. 217-8.

unfavourable for travelling ; the roads were considered too bad and too unsafe to admit of the projected journey ; and by January the Emperor was expressing his hopes that Hortense, with M. Napoleon, had returned home.

Notwithstanding this intimation that her absence from Holland had lasted long enough, it was not till the end of the month that the Royal family was once more assembled at the Hague. The younger child, Louis, had been sent back nearly two months earlier, at his father's instance ; but Hortense had lingered on, disregarding her husband's protests, until the Emperor's expressed wishes had come to hurry her movements. Since it was not in Holland that she spent New Year's Day it is evident that an incident said to have occurred upon it, and often repeated, must be, in its date at least, apocryphal ; but the story is so much in consonance with others related of little M. Napoleon and the position he occupied as the centre of interest, that it may be retold.

A case filled with toys of all sorts had been sent by Joséphine to her eldest grandson, the gifts having been unpacked and spread out before him in tempting array, as he sat by the window overlooking the park. To the surprise of those present the child regarded the magnificent playthings with indifference, his eyes constantly wandering away from them to rest upon the wintry scene outside. Disappointed at the absence of interest on her son's part, Hortense asked him if he were not grateful for his grandmother's gifts.

"Yes, *maman*," he answered politely. "But I am not surprised. She is so good to me that I am used to it."

"Then all these beautiful toys do not amuse you?" persisted the Queen.

"Yes, *maman*," replied the child once more. "But—I want something else."

"Tell me what it is," said his mother rashly, "and I promise you shall have it."

Napoleon refused to be convinced.

"You would not give it me," he replied, sadly.

Was it money for the poor? inquired Hortense, crediting her son with charitable aspirations. It was not. His father, Napoleon answered, had given him money for that purpose in the morning. It was already distributed. At a loss to understand what could be in the child's mind, Hortense spoke to him seriously. He knew, she told him, how much she loved him. He might be sure she would have him begin the New Year in a way that gave him pleasure. *Voyons*, what was it he wanted?

Thus pressed, the truth came out.

"*Maman*," said the child, "it is to go and walk in that beautiful mud—*cette belle boue*—in the alley. That, more than anything else, would amuse me."

Napoleon had been right in the limits he had set to his mother's complaisance. He was not permitted to have his wish; and throughout the day, with the persistency of a spoilt child, he continued to dwell upon the caprice he had not been allowed to gratify, to complain that the day had been *triste*, that he was

ennuyé, and would never be happy till, like other boys, he could run in the rain.¹

If the position occupied by the Prince Royal in the Imperial family was singular, it was not without some justification. He was no ordinary child; like others doomed to early death, he had developed early, and all witnesses are agreed as to his precocious charm. One anecdote after another evidences a tact and courtesy, a ready grace, which would have been remarkable at a much older age, and explains to some extent the affection lavished upon him not only by mother and father, but by others who might have been expected to be impartial judges.

"Monseigneur," said a lady, presenting her daughters, "I commend them to your goodness."

"Madame," replied the child, after a moment's pause, and regarding the speaker with a steady gaze reminding the narrator of his uncle—"madame, it is for these ladies to be good to me."²

The days when Napoleon Charles was to be the joy and pride and the cause of jealousy to father and mother were numbered. It was the last spring of his short life.

The bond of union he supplied could be ill spared; nor was there joy enough in the life of either parent to enable them to dispense with its chief source. If Louis found satisfaction in his son, nothing else was at this time calculated to afford it to him. Besides

¹ *Mémoires de la Duchesse de Saint-Leu*, pp. 28-9.

² *Mémoires du Baron Thiébault*, t. iv. p. 42.

normal conditions of ill-health and the constant domestic discord, his relations with his brother were becoming more and more strained. The causes of dissension can only be briefly indicated. They arose from the fact that, whilst Louis was regarded by Napoleon, in spite of the dignity he had conferred upon him, in the light of his own deputy and representative, bound above all to care for and safeguard the interests of France, the new King himself took an altogether different view of his duties towards his adopted country ; and, in the character of an independent sovereign, was in no way inclined to subordinate Holland to France. During the course of the campaign he had made it clear that the Emperor could not rely upon his obedience, and though Napoleon, contrary to what might have been expected of his despotic temper, had passed the matter over, and found excuses in his brother's state of health, he must have been made aware of the position the King had taken up. When, at Berlin, the Emperor proclaimed the continental blockade, Louis' attitude was still more pronounced. A rigid application of the system would have meant ruin for Holland, yet the alleviations or mitigations permitted, if not sanctioned, by Louis, were a direct infringement of the Imperial instructions.

During the past months he had been busily engaged in matters of internal administration ; had had under consideration the establishment of codes, civil and criminal, reforms in the executive, public works, and other such matters. He had also—a less

gratifying exhibition of his energy, so far as his new subjects were concerned—been arranging his Court on a scale out of all proportion to the financial resources at his command, had appointed great officers of State, created new grades, and founded orders of chivalry—all independent measures regarded by Napoleon with mingled displeasure and contempt. It was at this time that the Emperor made the ill-advised attempt to interpose between man and wife, by addressing to his brother the remonstrance already quoted. In the same letter he applied the lash of his scathing ridicule to Louis' public conduct. "You tell me," he wrote on April 4, "that you have 20,000 men with the Grande Armée. You do not believe it yourself. There are not 10,000—and what men! It is not marshals, knights, or counts that must be made, but soldiers. If you continue like this you will render me ridiculous in Holland. . . . I require enlightenment as to the re-establishment of the nobility. Have you lost your head to that extent, and forgotten what you owe me? Your letters ever speak of respect and obedience. I wish for not words, but deeds."¹ A few days later he is again holding Louis up to himself as an object of derision. His brother has little knowledge of men. "A prince of whom it is said 'he is a good fellow' is a lost king."²

Such language was not adapted to conciliate the man to whom it was addressed, or to incline him to accept with meekness the Emperor's strictures upon the manage-

¹ *Correspondance de Napoléon I.*, t. xv. p. 24.

² *Ibid.*, t. xv. p. 115.

ment of his domestic affairs. The relations of husband and wife had been further embittered in the course of the spring, when it would seem that Hortense had acted in a manner to give rise to just anger on the King's part. Although holding as much as possible aloof from him, and making no endeavour to disguise her sentiments, she had developed an inconsistent jealousy with regard to a Madame Huyghens, wife of the Dutch minister in Copenhagen, who had been attached by Louis to her household. Rightly or not, Hortense conceived that the reputation acquired by her new *dame de compagnie* in Denmark had not been such as to fit her for the post ; and the measures she took to prove her point resulted in the separation of the unfortunate woman from her husband and in her flight to France, where she died, discredited and in miserable circumstances. Conduct of this kind was not productive of peace, nor calculated to cause Louis to relax the insulting precautions bitterly resented by a wife who, it seems clear, had hitherto done nothing to justify his suspicions. Though her treatment of Madame Huyghens displays her in an unusually unattractive light, M. Masson's explanation is probably a fair one : " If she struck brutally enough to shatter a woman she regarded with indifference, it was like a child who, not venturing to rebel against its master, takes vengeance upon the toys within reach." ¹

Louis' reply to his brother's reprimand indicates the spirit in which he received the Imperial

¹ *Napoléon et sa famille*, t. iv. p. 133.

admonition. "As to the passage concerning my quarrels with the Queen," he wrote, "it is an unworthy falsehood. I have never had any. The public makes no mention of them ; but those who . . . amuse themselves by surrounding us with spies have accepted as truth what they desire should be true. This delicate matter, Sire, as your Majesty knows, touches my heart very sensibly. Your Majesty should spare me on this point, and save me from painful sentiments."

Louis can scarcely have expected that his disclaimer of the existence of disagreements with his wife should be accepted. In France they had been matter of public notoriety, and the closer companionship involved in their present manner of life could not fail to accentuate the incompatibility of their two natures. A distinctive mark of the King's character is said to have been order, and a *Règlement du Palais*, drawn out in his own handwriting, testifies to the minute care bestowed by him upon every household detail. The opening and shutting of windows, the blinds to be drawn, the shutters to be closed, the temperature to be maintained, are amongst the points dealt with in this singular paper,¹ full of directions upon all things, great and small ; and the disposition thus displayed, applied to personal matters, was certain to prove alienating to a wife no more gifted with patience than Hortense.

If Napoleon had been dealing severely with his brother, admonitions, mingled with her accustomed

¹ *L'Empire, les Bonaparte et la Cour* (Claretie), p. 41.

flattery, had been addressed by Madame Campan to the Queen. It is easy to perceive, reading between the lines, that Joséphine, uneasy at the condition of the Royal household, had sought the sympathy of her child's old and faithful friend, and the letter written by the latter on her return from a visit to the Palace may have been concerted between the two.

"How many touching things her Majesty said concerning what might be wanting to your happiness!" wrote the schoolmistress. "Try, madame, to omit nothing that can render your *intérieur* agreeable and can please the King. Home happiness—it is the only happiness; your Majesty thinks so, too. It has often to be obtained with care; but it brings its own reward. . . . Queen Hortense will always be cited for her virtues and her graces. She knows that history is waiting to place her name after that of the most marvellous of heroes, and by the side of a King developing daily the most touching and greatest degree of humanity. Prince Napoleon will enter the world with the fame of his father and mother, so that everything will be expected from his qualities."¹

So wrote Madame Campan, making use of every argument most likely to prove effective. The future of little Napoleon Charles was a factor soon to be removed from the reckoning. The time was at hand when a real and irremediable calamity was to throw into the shade, for the moment, not political complications alone, but domestic quarrels.

¹ *Correspondance de Madame Campan*, t. i. pp. 361-4.

CHAPTER XII

1807

The Prince Royal—His death—Hortense's grief—Relations with Louis—Meets her mother at Lâcken—Letters from Napoleon—At Malmaison and Caunterets—M. Decazes—The King and Queen at Toulouse.

THE spring of 1807 was to see the dissolution of the single strong bond of union between Hortense and her husband. So long as the child lived who was adored by both parents, his small hands, in a sense, held the two from falling entirely apart. With a melancholy and premature consciousness of their dissensions, he was accustomed to make use of "his almost magical influence to bring them together. Taking by the hand his father, who would allow himself to be conducted by that angel of peace towards Queen Hortense, he would say, 'Kiss her, *papa*, I beg of you,' his joy finding vent in eager and noisy transports when he had succeeded in effecting a reconciliation between the two he loved with equal tenderness."¹

Such tales, probably not without a foundation in fact, were current in the Imperial household. The mediator was now to be removed. On April 29

¹ *Mémoires de Constant*, t. iii. p. 303.

he was attacked by what was believed to be some species of intermittent fever, but proved to be croup. Though his condition had caused anxiety at first, it improved on the following day, and the Comte de Girardin, sent to Holland by Joseph Bonaparte with a view of raising money in his brother's dominions, was received in audience, with his colleagues, by King and Queen. The impression produced by Louis was most painful upon Girardin. Genuinely attached to him, believing it impossible to know and not to love him, and crediting him with all the qualities of an honest man, he found it hard to conceal his emotion as he looked upon the King's discoloured countenance and noted the difficulty he experienced in standing or walking. It was to him the spectacle of a living man in the grip of death.

The Queen was full of grace and cordiality ; she invited the visitors to dinner, an aide-de-camp of Prince Jérôme's, the children's *gouvernante*, Madame Boubers, and the baby Prince, Louis, being present, and talked to them with friendliness.

" I like people to write to me and to think of me," she said, with the wistfulness of the exile, as they presented letters entrusted to them by the Empress and others. " They would be wrong to forget me, for I forget no one."

Her apartments, to which the envoys were afterwards admitted, were furnished with extreme simplicity, and their reception, with its combination of graciousness and ease, impressed them favourably. But the palace

lay even then under the shadow of impending disaster, and when the guests next saw the Queen, on the evening of May 3, she was a prey to the anxiety caused by the development of unfavourable symptoms in the sick child. She had been, they were told, all day in tears, and though a passing improvement in the patient had taken place, it was only for a moment that she was visible.

The household shared in the distress of King and Queen. The heir was dear to all with whom he had been brought into contact, and the next day passed heavily. Every doctor of repute had been summoned to the palace, and a courier was dispatched to fetch the Imperial physician, Corvisart, from Paris. In the meantime Louis and Hortense together watched beside the child on whom, unloving to each other, the hearts of both were set. With alternations of hope and despair, the hours went by. On the evening of May 5 the little life, rapidly burning itself out, flickered up for the last time. Some English quack powders, of nature unknown, recommended for children, had produced a momentary rally, and the child asked for cards and pictures. The interval was of short duration; the death-agony quickly followed, and by midnight all was over.¹

On the previous night it had been at one time believed that death had already taken place, and the Queen had been compelled to leave the boy's side. Since then she had been for hours together in a condition of

¹ *Discours et opinions* (Girardin), t. iii, pp. 399-410.



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unconsciousness. Roused from it, her sorrow was one of the kind that finds no relief in tears. Motionless, mute, her eyes fixed and vacant, she suffered in silence. Louis, softened by the sense of common calamity, would, if he could, have acted as her comforter, but it is not an office to be filled at will. Passively consenting to be removed to a house in the neighbourhood, which, belonging to one of the Court ladies, offered the advantage of a change of scene, she nevertheless accepted his advances with gentleness, thanking him for his care ; and had he known how to make use of the opportunity afforded him, it is possible that an amelioration in the relations of the two might have been the result. But with an ill-timed and eager desire to force an explanation, he took the line of urging upon the mother absorbed in the thought of her irrecoverable loss a confession of sins she had not committed.

“Confide your weaknesses to me,” he besought her ; “I forgive them all. We will enter upon a future by which the past will be for ever effaced.”

It was language that might fitly have been employed towards a woman conscious of guilt. Hortense had no such consciousness. “With all the solemnity of grief, and of the hope she entertained of dying, she made reply that, ready to yield up her soul to God, she would not have to take to Him the shadow of a guilty thought. The King, continuing incredulous, demanded that she should declare it on oath ; and having obtained this, still unable to persuade himself to

believe it, he reiterated his singular entreaties with so much importunity that his wife, worn out by her sorrow, by the answers she had been called upon to make, and by this continued persecution, feeling herself to be fainting, said : ‘Leave me in peace. I shall not escape you. To-morrow we will resume the conversation.’ Saying this, she lost consciousness anew.”¹

It was not after this fashion that the reconstruction of domestic peace should have been attempted. Yet Louis, no doubt, was acting according to his lights. Possessed by groundless and harassing suspicions, he conceived that a candid avowal of the truth would be the sole foundation for future tranquillity. Had his surmises been justified, he would have been right. As it was, the wall of separation was strengthened and cemented.

When, some few days later, Girardin was again admitted to an audience, he describes the scene he witnessed. King and Queen were present, with the assembled household, Hortense maintaining an unbroken silence. Returning to the presence-chamber after a private interview with Louis, he found her listening—or not listening—with slow tears falling, whilst an attendant read *Gil Blas* aloud.

On the following day she received another visit from the French agents. For a quarter of an hour she kept silence, as on the preceding occasion ; then, with a sudden change of mood, signed to them to approach, addressing them in low, suppressed tones. Unhinged

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii. pp. 138-9.

and off her balance, it may be that the predominating need of an outlet in words broke down the barrier despair had built up, and confidence is at times more easily bestowed upon a sympathetic stranger than upon those ever at hand. It is evident that Girardin had been acquainted with her in earlier, happier days, and some association with the past may have moved her to speak with sudden and unexpected openness.

"I am suffocated," she told him. ". . . I have become insensible. I feel nothing more. I can speak of Napoleon—of my son—without a tear. I have seen him dead, no longer breathing. I had not courage to kiss him." And then followed the time-honoured complaint. "Why does Heaven punish me so cruelly—I who have never done any one any harm?"¹

The condition of the unhappy mother was beginning to cause alarm to those around her. Save for the few members of her household brought from France, she was a lonely stranger, in a foreign land, with none near her to whom she would naturally have turned for sympathy. It was singular that it should have been her old and inveterate enemy, Caroline Murat, who came at this juncture to the rescue. It was true, as Madame de Rémusat observes, that the Grand Duchess was in no way fitted to offer consolation to the two—Joséphine and her daughter—she so much hated; her practical intervention nevertheless did what was possible to alleviate the

¹ *Discours et opinions* (Girardin), t. iii, p. 442.

situation. It would manifestly be well that Hortense and her mother should meet ; but Napoleon was still abroad, nor could the ill tidings reach him till May 15 Joséphine, longing to be with her daughter, was afraid to leave Paris without her husband's permission, nor did Louis dare to allow his wife to quit Holland until the Emperor had been consulted. Caroline had no such scruples. Assuming responsibility for what was to be done, she decided Joséphine upon proceeding to Lâcken, near Brussels, where she would be met by Hortense ; and starting in person for the Hague, encouraged her brother to take his wife to the Empress.¹ Her suggestions were followed, and by May 14 the latter had reached Lâcken and was awaiting her daughter there.

"Come to give me back life," Joséphine wrote. "Your presence is necessary to me, and you, too, must need to see me and to weep with your mother. I should have wished to go further, but strength failed me, nor had I time to inform the Emperor. I found courage to come hither ; and I hope you will find enough to come and see your mother. I am overcome with fatigue ; but most of all with grief."²

During the few hours spent at Lâcken before she was joined by Hortense, she had written to Napoleon. In his reply a certain irritation at the prolongation of a regret not yet more than a few days old is

¹ *Napoléon et sa famille* (Masson), t. iv. p. 139.

² *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i. pp. 272-3.

perceptible. "I see with grief," he says, "that your sorrow is still no less, and that Hortense has not yet arrived. She is not reasonable, and does not deserve to be loved, since she loved none but her children." ¹

His letters at the first news of the child's death had been couched in more sympathetic terms; but always impatient of weakness, he was already desiring to brace Hortense to endure with courage the calamity that had overtaken her. "My daughter," he wrote from Finkenstein six days later, "all I hear from the Hague shows me that you are not reasonable. However legitimate your sorrow, it should have limits. Do not injure your health. Give yourself distractions, and know that life is sown with so many reefs and may be the source of such manifold ills, that death is not the greatest of all evils." ²

To Joséphine he had written in a softer vein. "I understand all the grief that must have been caused you by the death of this poor Napoleon. You will understand the sorrow I feel. I would I were near you, that you might be temperate and wise in your grieving. You have had the happiness never to lose a child, but it is one of the conditions and penalties attached to our human misery. Let me hear that you have been reasonable and that you are well. Do you wish to increase my sorrow?" ³

Napoleon's grief was that of a strong man, deep and silent. There were those, like Talleyrand, who,

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i. pp. 323-4.

² *Ibid.* t. i. p. 322.

³ *Ibid.* t. i. pp. 317-8

looking on, misunderstood his self-restraint and interpreted it as callous indifference. Something in his bearing may have been due to the pride of a man who will not avow that he is hard hit. Close observers such as Fouché were not deceived. "Never," said he, "did I see Napoleon the prey of a more concentrated and profound sorrow."¹

The meeting of mother and daughter, described by M. de Rémusat to his wife, was a melancholy one. It had taken place on the 15th, the day after Joséphine's arrival at Läckén, and his letter was written on the 16th, whilst the recollection of the scene remained distinct in his memory. "The Queen," he wrote, ". . . is precisely in the condition in which Nina is represented on the stage. She has but one idea—the loss she has experienced. She speaks of but one thing—*him*. There is not a tear—nothing but a cold composure, her eyes almost fixed, a silence nearly complete, only broken to rend the hearts of those who hear her. If she sees any one whom in other days she saw with her son, she looks at him with kindness and interest.

"‘You know,’ she says, very low, ‘he is dead.’

"When she arrived she said to her mother, ‘It is not long since he was here with me. I held him thus, upon my knee.’

"Some moments later, catching sight of me, she signed to me to approach.

"‘Do you remember Mayence?’ she asked me. ‘He played with us in the comedy.’

¹ *Mémoires de Fouché*, t. ii. p. 377.

“Hearing ten o'clock strike, she turned to one of her ladies :

“‘You know,’ she said to her, ‘it was at ten that he died.’

“This is how she breaks her almost continuous silence. With all this she is good, sensible, fully rational. She recognises her own condition, and even speaks of it. She is happy, she says, to have become insensible ; otherwise she would have suffered too much. They asked her if she had been moved on seeing her mother. ‘No,’ she said, ‘but I am very glad to have seen her.’ They told her how much the Empress had been hurt by the lack of emotion she had shown at their meeting.

“‘Oh, *mon Dieu*,’ she answered, ‘do not let her be angry ; I am like that.’

“If they ask her any question, except on the subject of her grief, ‘It is the same to me,’ she replies ; ‘let it be as you will.’ She believes she needs to be alone with her grief ; but, nevertheless, she will not see the places that remind her of her son.”¹

Napoleon was right. Hortense, in her desolation, was not “reasonable.” The picture given is of a grief, uncontrolled, unrestrained—that of an undisciplined nature, self-absorbed in its misery. But not for this reason is it less pitiful. Napoleon, to whom the meeting of mother and daughter had been reported, again displays some severity in his comments.

“I am sorry for what you tell me of the species of

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii, pp. 141-2.

stupor in which Hortense remains," he wrote to Joséphine, May 26. "She must have more courage, and take order with herself (*qu'elle prenne sur elle*). I do not understand why they wish her to go to the waters; she would be much more distracted (*dissipée*) at Paris. . . . I suffer much from all your sorrows. I am sorry not to be near you."¹

The Empress lost no time in repairing to Malmaison, carrying her daughter with her. Louis did not accompany them. He had lingered at Lâcken no longer than was necessary to place his wife in her mother's care, returning forthwith to the manifold duties necessarily set aside for the moment; and, restless in his bereavement, was moving incessantly from place to place, and filling his days with all kinds of business.

The loss sustained by the Royal family appears to have called forth no great display of sympathy on the part of the Dutch people. The death of the Prince was characterised as *fâcheux* by Chamguyon, Regent of Amsterdam, in a conversation with Girardin. The child, he added, was to have been the Emperor's heir, repeating, when the Frenchman expressed some doubts on the matter, that the fact had passed for certain in Holland. The King, Chamguyon was of opinion, would lay the blame of the disaster upon the climate, and would be disgusted with the country, only one child remaining to him, and that a delicate one. To Girardin's suggestion that others might be born to a couple still young, he answered dubiously. Louis, he

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i, p. 329.

observed, was ill, and Dutch doctors had made their calculations upon the probable duration of his life. Expressing the national estimate of the sovereign, he paid a tribute to the estimable qualities he possessed as a man, qualifying his praise by remarking that for a ruler they did not suffice.¹ The cool appreciation was reflected in the indifference with which the tragedy at the palace was publicly regarded. At the Hague the little heir's death seemed to be ignored. "This people has been conquered, but has not given itself," was the conclusion of the French agent. "It endures what it was powerless to prevent."² Under the circumstances it may have been wise to avoid the appeal that would have been made to popular sentiment had the child lain in state—a measure, in Girardin's opinion, due to the importance of the position he had occupied. The body was placed in the throne-room, and was afterwards conveyed to Saint-Leu, where, in his father and mother's French home, they had intended that he should rest.

In accompanying her mother to Malmaison, Hortense had left the little Louis behind at Läckén. It was arranged that his father should take him to Paris, to remain in the care of the Empress whilst his mother, in obedience to medical advice, sought the waters of Cauterets. She had no desire, at the present moment, to keep her son with her. On the contrary, she shrank from the child almost as if he were proposed to her

¹ *Discours et opinions* (Girardin), t. iii. p. 428.

² *Ibid.* t. iii. p. 414

as a substitute for the dead, and it was only at a later date that, on her return to a more normal state of health and spirits, the motherly instinct re-awakened. Her short stay in France did nothing to mitigate her grief, and the former condition of stupor continued unbroken. "I have never witnessed a sorrow so painful to behold," says Madame de Rémusat. Pallid and motionless, the tears of those who approached seemed to occasion her a sort of surprise. "Why do you weep?" she asked them. "He is dead—I know it well. But I assure you that I do not suffer. I feel nothing at all."¹

The Empress shared her grief to the full. "Never," wrote Fouché, "did I see Joséphine and her daughter in more bitter affliction. They appeared to look forward thenceforth to a future without joy and without hope. Even courtiers had pity on a sorrow so great. I thought I saw the chain of imperial perpetuity severed."²

Fouché's words point to those questions of policy by which, in her mother's case, if not in that of Hortense, grief was complicated and enhanced. There had not been wanting, during those months of absence, letters, written by the Emperor in moments, perhaps, of loneliness, well fitted to assure his wife of the place she still held in his heart. "I love none but my little Joséphine," he had told her, only in May, "good, *boudeuse*, and capricious, who

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii, p. 141.

² *Mémoires de Fouché*, t. i, p. 377.

knows how to conduct a quarrel, like everything else, with grace.”¹ Yet none knew better than she how little sentiment could be counted upon to prevail against the demands of ambition and statecraft. With Napoleon Charles as her ally she might have hoped for victory ; but how would it be now that that small pilgrim had taken his way elsewhere ? Who could tell ? Meanwhile the impatience growing upon the Emperor at the lack of self-control displayed by his stepdaughter was almost extended to his wife.

“ I am angry with Hortense,” he told Joséphine ; “ she does not write me a word. All that you say of her grieves me. Why have you not been able to distract her a little ? You weep. Give Hortense this letter.”

To his stepdaughter he used still plainer language.

“ You have not written me a word in your great and just grief. You have forgotten everything, as if you had nothing further to lose. They say that you care for nothing—that you are indifferent to all. I perceive it from your silence. It is not right, Hortense ; it is not what you promised us. Your son was all in all to you. Your mother and I are then nothing. Had I been at Malmaison I should have shared your grief ; but I should have also desired that you should give yourself back to your best friends. Adieu, my daughter, be gay—one must be

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i. p. 313.

resigned. Be well, that you may fulfil your duties. My wife is grieved at your condition. Occasion her no more sorrow.”¹

Before the Emperor's letter was written, Hortense had quitted Malmaison, and set out, with a limited train, for the waters of Cauterets. Louis, in Holland, had proved also unequal to the strain of remaining at the Hague. In a letter to his mother-in-law, containing expressions of anxiety and affection for his wife, he gives a vivid impression of the blank left in his life. “I am surrounded by the places where my children dwelt, and by memories of Napoleon. I am unable to walk a step without having recollections brought back to my mind—recent incidents—of how I held him in my arms, or was a witness of his games and of his liveliness.”²

Under these circumstances he caught eagerly and gratefully at the permission accorded him by his brother to leave his dominions for a time, and to seek what alleviation might be afforded to his ills, mental and physical, by a resort to a southern climate. Calling for his infant son at Läckén, he repaired first to France, where he was to place the child in the hands of its grandmother, before proceeding further on his search after health. The letter from Joséphine announcing to Hortense the arrival of the travellers at Saint-Leu implies that change of scene had had a good effect upon her daughter. In the course of the journey

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i. pp. 328-9.

² *Napoléon et sa famille* (F. Masson), t. iv. p. 140.

it would seem that a violent storm had taken place. On the day of the child's death there had chanced to have been another. Listening to the thunder, the circumstances of that day had been suddenly and vividly recalled, and the unhappy mother had broken at last into violent weeping. From that moment her grief took a more normal course, and her powers of feeling and suffering were restored.¹ It was probably to this incident that Joséphine referred on June 4.

"Your letter has comforted me," she wrote, "and the news of your health I receive from your ladies contributes much to tranquillise me. . . . The King arrived yesterday evening at Saint-Leu. He has sent to say that he will come to see me to-day. He is to leave me the little one during his absence. You know how I love that child, and what care I will give him. I hope the King will take the same route as you. It will be a consolation for you both to meet again. All the letters I have received from him since his departure are filled with affection for you. Your heart is too *sensible* not to be touched by it."²

It appears that at Orleans Hortense had at last broken the silence she had hitherto preserved towards the Emperor. In Napoleon's acknowledgment of a letter she had written from that place there is evident the same desire as before to inculcate lessons of endurance and resignation upon the woman who stood so greatly

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii. p. 142.

² *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. ii. pp. 276-7.

in need of them. The very sternness perceptible may have had its use.

"Your sorrow moves me," he wrote; "but I should wish to know that you had greater courage. To live is to suffer, and the good strive to remain masters of themselves. I do not like to see you unjust towards little Napoleon Louis and towards all your friends. Your mother and I hoped that we counted for more in your heart than we do. I gained a great victory [Friedland] on June 14. I am well, and love you much. Adieu, my daughter; I embrace you with all my heart."¹

Time is the great physician, and, more than her stepfather's exhortations, was bringing Hortense to a saner condition. Joséphine's desire that she and her husband should make their journey together was not fulfilled; but a meeting took place at Cauterets, when a species of domestic life was resumed, whilst Louis took advantage of the proximity of the medicinal springs of Saint-Sauveur, the true motive of his presence in the neighbourhood. Early in July he had arrived at the conclusion that the waters of Ussat would prove more beneficial, and had accordingly proceeded thither, leaving his wife to pursue her cure alone.

Though Hortense's restlessness took a different form from that driving the King from place to place on his vain quest after health, it was scarcely less than his. She developed a taste for expeditions of all kinds, exploring the country around, "flying from herself"

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i. p. 329.

by means of a constant change of scene. Besides the members of her household by whom she was attended, she saw few visitors, and strangers rarely found admission to her presence. The neighbouring poor, however, learnt to love her, partly no doubt on account of the alms they received, but perhaps more by reason of the gentle words valued more from a Queen than from another. Her Pyrennean guides, it is clear, had been inspired with a personal interest by their charge.

“Poor lady,” one of them is reported to have said, “when we met a woman with her *gars*, all ruddy and strong, we heard her sob. Seeing that, I said to Clément, we must climb the mountain, so as not to remain in sight of the child. Ah, she wept much.”¹

Before Hortense quitted the mountain watering-place, she had made an unfortunate acquaintance. M. Decazes, a young Gascon filling a legal post at Paris, had arrived with an introduction from Madame Cochelet to her daughter, formerly Hortense’s school-mate and now appointed to be her *lectrice*. Introduced by Mademoiselle Cochelet to her mistress, not more than a fortnight before she left Cauterets, Madame de Rémusat, though always an indulgent critic, confesses that the Queen, “too unhappy to pay the attention she should have done to conventional usage,” was unwise in the degree of favour she showed her new acquaintance. M. Decazes was in mourning for his young wife; and conscious of

¹ *Mémoires de la Duchesse d'Abrantès*, t. vi. p. 348.

the bond produced by suffering and attracted by the man's personality, Hortense admitted him to a measure of intimacy, during the short remainder of her visit to Cauterets, rendered the more conspicuous by the comparative seclusion in which she had so far elected to live. That any further connection existed between them there is absolutely nothing to show. Hortense's conduct was in full accordance with her usual disregard of prejudice; and the fact that, the young man desiring advancement, she commended him to her husband and that he became Louis' trusted subordinate, goes far to discredit the scandal that gained circulation. Nevertheless, "letters were written to Paris and words were lightly spoken of the Queen and M. Decazes." ¹

A second visitor had also, during Hortense's residence at Cauterets, come thither to pay his respects to the wife of his sovereign. This was M. Verhuell, accredited by Louis to the court of Madrid, and staying at the time at Barèges. In view of the story which has attempted to fix the paternity of Hortense's third son, the future Napoleon III., upon the Dutch Admiral, Marshal of Holland, it is well to point out, as M. Masson has done, that the Verhuell who visited Cauterets at this time was not Carel Hendrik, with whom her name has been associated, and who was detained at his post as Minister of War, but his brother, to whom no special interest attaches.²

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii. p. 142.

² *Napoléon et sa famille* (Masson), t. iv. p. 148

By August 10 the Queen had decided, not without regret, that her stay in the mountains must end ; and a day or two later she had joined her husband at Toulouse, where an amicable meeting took place. Louis' cure had been attended with some degree of success, and, in better health, he may have been more favourably disposed towards his wife. By the 27th, travelling slowly, the two had reached Saint-Cloud.

CHAPTER XIII

1807—1809

Caroline Murat and Junot—She spreads reports against Hortense—Louis' suspicions—Renewal of domestic hostilities—The Court at Fontainebleau—Joséphine's fears—Hortense's life in Paris—Her musical compositions—Birth of Napoleon III.—Louis' endeavour to obtain possession of his elder son—Napoleon Louis created Grand Duke of Berg.

IT has been seen that it was by the personal intervention of Caroline Murat that the meeting of Hortense and her mother, consequent upon the death of Napoleon Charles, was contrived. If she had been moved by compassion to a momentary suspension of her hostility, it was of short duration. The rivalry between the sisters-in-law was of too old a date to be easily surmounted ; and the Grand Duchess had, besides, grievances of her own unfavourable to the maintenance of an equable condition of mind and temper. In the fashion after which she strove, upon his return to Paris, to disturb the unusual harmony reigning in her brother Louis' household a reflection of her private annoyances may be detected.

Junot, at this time Governor of Paris, had succumbed during Napoleon's absence to the attractions

of the Emperor's youngest sister to an extent considered to be compromising to the object of his devotion. On his return to the capital in the course of the summer, Napoleon had become aware of the reports in circulation and—always jealous of his family honour—had sent for the General and taxed him with his conduct. A stormy interview had ensued, Junot opposing a bold defence to the charges brought against him and reproaching the Emperor in his turn with unmerited distrust. Napoleon listened, and would, he declared, have been gladly convinced. But he refused to admit that the Governor had not, at least, been guilty of imprudence. Why had the Grand Duchess made use of his carriages, his boxes at the theatre? Why had his liveries been seen at the Élysée—her residence—at two o'clock in the morning? ¹ Whatever might have been the limits of the General's culpability, it was clear that he was best out of the way. The command of the army of the Gironde was bestowed upon him, and he was sent into honourable banishment.

Caroline, probably the most to blame, remained in Paris, to exercise her wiles upon Fouché, Metternich, and whomsoever else was most calculated to further her ambitious projects. In her intervals of leisure she unfortunately turned her attention upon her brother and his wife. In August Junot had left Paris. By the end of that month the Louis Bonapartes had arrived there on new and friendly terms seeming to

¹ *Mémoires de la Duchesse d'Abrantès*, t. vi, p. 456.

promise them a happier future. "I often heard the Empress say," wrote Madame de Rémusat, "that at the moment of their return, her daughter was profoundly touched by the grief of her husband ; that, in suffering and sadness, a new bond had been formed between them, and that she felt she could forgive him the past."¹

Caroline Murat, like others, looked on and arrived at her conclusions. Was it possible that a lasting peace was to be established between the domestic belligerents ? She appears to have decided that a Beauharnais triumph—especially at a moment when Joséphine's fate hung more than ever in the balance—must not be risked. And, opportunely, came the recollection of M. Decazes and his visit to Cauterets. She promptly made use of it.

It would have seemed, at first sight, that little capital could have been derived from an acquaintanceship Hortense considered so unimportant that she was accustomed to talk freely on the subject, saying how greatly she had been touched by the young man's grief. But Caroline was well acquainted with her brother. The seed of distrust, sown by an adroit hand, could be reckoned upon to assume without delay the proportions of the mustard-tree ; and by a skilful allusion to reports and calumnies for the truth of which she did not vouch, the Grand Duchess was successful in rousing the unhappy man to fresh suspicion, and instilled into his mind doubts as to

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii. p. 144.

the paternity of the child whose birth was expected in the spring.¹

Joséphine may not have been altogether blameless in the matter. On the arrival of her daughter in Paris, it had been arranged by her desire that, whilst Louis inhabited his house in the rue Cérutti, Hortense should take up her residence with her mother, an unwise, ill-considered interruption to the new-born domesticity of the household. Further, alarmed at the condition of the Queen's health, and dreading the effect upon it likely to result from a return to the climate of Holland, the Empress so far impressed upon the Emperor the necessity of her daughter's staying in France until after the birth of her child that, in deference to his wife's wishes, and to the decrees of the docile physicians, he issued orders that Hortense, with Napoleon Louis, should be left behind when his brother was recalled by his duties to his dominions. The step was an unfortunate one. Had his wife remained with Louis in Paris, and accompanied him to Holland, it is possible that Caroline's insinuations might have failed to produce their effect. Separated from her, and embittered by his brother's renewed interference, he became once more a prey to his morbid habit of mind, not only harbouring the suspicions suggested by his sister, but allowing his wife to perceive that he did so. The result was what might have been anticipated. Hitherto, it appears,

¹ Such was the part assigned by Joséphine to Caroline (see *Mémoires de Madame de Remusat*).

Hortense had played a passive part, and it was in accordance with her mother's representations, and not at her own request, that the Emperor's commands had been given. "But when she understood that her sorrow had not been respected, and that she had been believed to be capable of carrying on a love-intrigue at a moment when she had only desired death, she fell into a condition of complete discouragement. Indifferent to the present, to the future, to all ties, to esteem as well as to hatred, she regarded her husband with a contempt she perhaps permitted to be too visible, and only thought of how to multiply occasions of remaining apart from him.¹ . . . 'From this time,' she often said to me, 'I understood that there was no cure for my misfortunes. I looked upon my life as destroyed ; I regarded greatness—the throne—with horror ; I often cursed what was termed by so many my good fortune, and felt myself to be a stranger to all enjoyment in life, deprived of all its illusions, and almost dead to what went on around me !' " ²

Thus Madame de Rémusat describes the situation. It is evident that either she made some confusion of dates or that Louis' suspicions had, so far, gained a partial and intermittent triumph over saner views and a more generous confidence in his wife. For not until after the birth of her son did his conduct betray any genuine doubt that the child was his. There is, however, nothing improbable in the hypothesis

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii, p. 146.

² *Ibid.*, t. iii, p. 210.

that the apprehensions infused into him by Caroline, having been treated by Hortense with indignation and contempt, should have been temporarily laid to rest, to re-awaken when circumstances appeared to his jaundiced vision to lend colour to the scandal.

Accepting Madame de Rémusat's account as belonging to this autumn, the condition she depicts is natural enough in a woman whose grief was still green and the bitterness evoked by her husband's distrust in its first freshness ; and a melancholy picture is supplied of her frame of mind as she shared in the gay life of the Court at this season.

It was September 20 when Louis, angry and sore at heart, started for Holland, leaving, in obedience to Napoleon's mandate, wife and child behind him. On the following day the Court adjourned to Fontainebleau, where a brilliant company assembled, including the Queen of Naples ; Jérôme Bonaparte, now King of Westphalia, and his bride, Princess Catherine of Würtemberg ; Murat and his wife, industriously engaged in the endeavour to obtain a crown ; Pauline Borghese ; *Madame Mère* ; the Grand Duke of Baden, with his wife, Stéphanie de Beauharnais, and a crowd of other visitors, amongst whom the representatives of ancient German principalities mingled freely with the newly-created dignitaries of the empire.

Returned triumphant from his campaign, with his ascendancy in Europe established to all appearance on a firmer footing than ever, Napoleon was bent upon rendering his Court worthy of his fortunes, and

addressed himself to the task with as much energy and vigour as he displayed in preparing for a battle. Amusements were prescribed by order ; guests were drilled and marshalled ; etiquette was rigidly observed. A monarch tracing his descent from generations of kings might have afforded to relax the conventions and formalities of Court life. Napoleon, a self-made sovereign, was in a different position, and clung to the outward and visible signs of his dignity. "He did not know how to put any one at their ease, nor did he, I believe, desire it, fearing the least appearance of familiarity, and inspiring in each the apprehension of having some uncivil words addressed to them before witnesses." ¹ Under these circumstances it was scarcely surprising that gaiety and the freedom which alone can produce pleasant social intercourse were conspicuous by their absence. The Emperor perceived and resented his failure.

"It is a singular thing," he complained. "I have gathered together a large party at Fontainebleau ; I wished that they should be amused. I have arranged all their pleasures ; and faces are long, and each person looks wearied and *triste*."

Talleyrand, with the candour of a favourite servant, took upon himself to explain the matter.

"It is because pleasure cannot be commanded by beat of drum," he told his master, "and that here, as with the army, you always seem to be saying to us, '*Allons, Messieurs et Mesdames, Forward, March !*'"

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii. p. 233.

The minister offered his sincere commiseration to the Chamberlain, Rémusat.

"I pity you," he said. "It is your office to amuse the unamusable."

What could be accomplished by order and rule was done. Each evening of the week was set apart for some different form of entertainment—a dramatic representation, balls given by Pauline and Caroline Murat in turn, gatherings in the Empress' apartments, receptions of the Emperor's own. Nor were the Court diversions confined to those that could be carried on indoors. The weather was favourable to open-air pastimes; October and November were exceptionally fine, and hunting was in fashion. A special costume was commanded by the Emperor, and each princess adopted a different uniform. The ladies of Hortense's household wore blue and silver, Caroline's rose-colour, Pauline's lilac. The men were dressed in green, with gold or silver trimmings. Yet, with every effort to induce merriment, the laughter must often have rung false. There were times when Napoleon himself, starting on a hunting-party, would seem to forget the motive of the expedition, and, quitting the company, would follow some devious path through the green forest glades, and, with but a single attendant, would pursue his way in moody and abstracted silence; nor were those who looked below the surface deceived by Joséphine's pathetic attempts to do her duty by joining in the prescribed hilarity. She would melt into tears as she gazed at the treasured lock of fair

hair cut from the head of the little heir lying in the small grave at Notre Dame to which he had been removed from Saint-Leu at the Emperor's desire. Hortense, said a looker-on, proved, in being alive, that sorrow does not kill.¹ The thought of Eugène, the brother she loved, was her chief link to life, so she would say ; for him alone did she rejoice in the Imperial greatness.

With Napoleon she continued on terms of affection ; but whether or not he had abandoned the endeavour to rouse her to greater courage, he must have retained his conviction that, in her grief, his stepdaughter was not *raisonnable*. Unfit, mentally or physically, to cope with her misfortune, she withdrew as much as might be from the life carried on around her, making no effort to oppose a brave front to an adverse fate. Friends she possessed, true and faithful ; but in Eugène's absence there was none of her own blood with whom she was in full sympathy. Though love, tender and strong, might unite mother and daughter, the characters of the two bear out the assertion that the comprehension springing from natural affinity was lacking to their affection. To Hortense, in the grip of a first overwhelming sorrow, the proportions of lesser cares—a quarrel with the Emperor resulting from some extravagant purchase, or a passing access of jealousy—were necessarily dwarfed.

“Are these misfortunes?” she would ask with a melancholy smile, as the elder woman recounted her

¹ *Mémoires de la Duchesse d'Abrantès*, t. vi.

grievances ; and even the more serious issues contained in the question of a divorce failed to elicit from her all the sympathy that was undeniably in this case her mother's due. Viewing the prospect of the catastrophe rather as the loss of a crown than of a husband, it left her cold.

“Almost always her answer to her mother was, ‘How can a throne be regretted?’”

On Joséphine, who loved the world and the things of the world, the absence of response must have struck chill. But she was too gentle-natured to resent it.

Meantime Hortense's future was hanging in the balance. More and more she shrank, with a passionate recoil, from the prospect of a return to Holland. Yet, so long as she was bound to Louis Bonaparte, the renewal of her banishment could be no more than a question of time. Though giving his sanction to her remaining in France until after the birth of her child, the Emperor, autocratic ruler no less of his family than of France, persisted in treating the ultimate reunion of husband and wife as a thing settled and certain. Nor were incidents wanting to rouse her to increased disquiet. Not a month after Louis' departure an intimation was inserted in the *Journal de l'Empire* to the effect that the Queen of Holland was shortly returning to her dominions. Terrified at the idea that the paper was acting as the mouthpiece of the Emperor and gave expression to his intentions, she questioned Fouché, and, to her relief, forced from him the avowal that the announcement emanated, not from Napoleon,

but from his mother, and, therefore, indirectly from her husband. Reassured as to her worst fears, Hortense lost no time in causing a contradiction to be inserted in the *Journal* stating that, in the doctor's opinion, it would be impossible for her to move for some months. The peril was only temporarily averted. Favourable to her present plans, Napoleon continued firm in his opposition to any plea for ultimate separation. Hortense might urge that her reputation was tarnished, her health lost, her happiness gone; she might express her indifference to crown or to worldly advantages, assert that her single desire was to lead a life of tranquillity and repose—a life which it was clear could not be enjoyed in conjunction with Louis Bonaparte—but though not unmoved, Napoleon continued unshaken in his rejection of the solution offered by a divorce, and Hortense was forced to be content with his provisional concessions.

A diversion had been afforded to the deeper griefs and profounder cares weighing upon Joséphine and her daughter by a dramatic episode of a serio-comic nature performed for the benefit of the Court. The heroine of it was the Grand Duchess of Baden, once the object of Napoleon's capricious attentions, and now regarded by him with indifference. Eighteen months of married life had done little to reconcile her to her fate; and no longer occupying the position of the Emperor's favourite toy, but relegated to her place as a simple Grand Duchess—one German Princess amongst others—it must have been a blow to

her vanity to find that her brief exaltation was a thing of the past. Means of amusement, however, were not wanting, and she had promptly turned her attention from the indifferent elder brother to the young Jérôme, more suitable in point of years, and who, though married only in August, was by no means insensible to her charms. The pseudo love affair made rapid progress ; at all Court balls the two were partners ; whilst Jérôme's bride, a German taking life seriously and already sentimentally attached to the husband on whom she had been bestowed, took no part in the dancing, and contemplated his proceedings with disquiet. Matters at length reached a climax. At an entertainment during which Jérôme had been more assiduous than ever in his attendance upon Stéphanie, the young Queen was seen to turn white, to shed tears, and finally to swoon. Consternation ensued. Joséphine busied herself with her unconscious sister-in-law, the Emperor addressed his brother in terms of sharp rebuke, and Stéphanie, kind-hearted as she proved afterwards to be, was doubtless reduced to shame and penitence, as she listened to the reprimands bestowed by Napoleon upon her fellow-culprit. When angry he was not used to measure his language. "If the majesty of kings be impressed upon their countenances," he once told Jérôme, "you may very well travel incognito. You will never be discovered."¹ By whatever methods he recalled him on the present occasion to a sense of his delinquency, they were

¹ *Secret Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte*, p. 23.

effectual. The young King, alarmed and remorseful, followed his wife to the chamber to which she had been carried, and did his best, on her return to consciousness, to make his peace. "I looked on in silence," said Madame de Rémusat, "keenly alive to the fact that this Jérôme, placed upon a throne by a number of circumstances certainly independent of any merit on his part, had become the object of the Princess's passion, and had all at once acquired the right to be loved by her and to neglect her." But spectators and actors regard matters in a different light; and Catherine, her head on her husband's shoulder and receiving his penitent kisses, was not difficult to appease. Napoleon, having taken order with his brother, desired Joséphine to perform the same duty towards her niece; Stéphanie proved amenable to reason, took the reprimands bestowed upon her in good part, promised amendment, and not only reformed her manners so as to give no further cause for complaint, but, like a princess in a fairy tale, lived happy with her husband ever after.¹

The season at Fontainebleau, with all its gaiety, had not gone by without a marked accentuation of Joséphine's sense of insecurity. Napoleon, on his return from the campaign, deprived of the child to whom he had looked to supply to him the place of a son, had spoken plainly to his wife of the necessity with which he might find himself confronted of taking steps to obtain a direct heir. "Should

¹ *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii. pp. 245-6.

this happen," he told her, not without emotion, "it would be for you to help me to make the sacrifice." Upon her affection he would count to save him from the odium of forcing a rupture by taking the initiative in the breach. To ask her to precipitate her destruction was to demand more than Joséphine was capable of doing. He was the master, was all that she replied ; it rested with him to decide her fate. So soon as he commanded her to quit the palace she would obey ; but his positive and explicit orders were necessary to determine her upon doing so.

Thus matters stood when the move to Fontainebleau, with all the social activity involved, suspended further action or discussion ; and thus they remained till a bold step on the part of Fouché, Minister of Police, re-awakened all Joséphine's fears. The Minister had belonged rather to the Beauharnais than to the Bonaparte faction ; but whether or not owing to some influence exerted by Caroline Murat, he had become convinced that it was essential to the durability of the Empire that Joséphine should be sacrificed. It was, he told Bourrienne somewhat brutally, to be wished that the Empress might die. Many difficulties would thus disappear. Sooner or later the Emperor must have a wife who would bear him children. So long as he had no direct heir, his death would be the signal for the dissolution of the Empire, and a new party would be formed in favour of the Bourbons.¹

As Joséphine was alive, and there was no immediate

¹ *Mémoires de Bourrienne*, t. vi. p. 357.

prospect of her decease, it was essential, in Fouché's eyes, for the stability of the dynasty, that a divorce should set Napoleon free to form fresh ties. By his account, his master had made it plain to him that his decision was taken, although affection for the Empress still held him back from making it known to her. Under these circumstances, the minister, "from excess of zeal," resolved himself to broach the subject to the unfortunate woman ; and one Sunday at Fontainebleau, drawing her into the recess of a window, he performed his self-imposed task, supplementing the announcement of her impending fate by a lengthy paper placing before her the question at issue, with all that hung upon it, and conjuring her to become a voluntary sacrifice to France, and to the Emperor.¹

This was Fouché's version of the affair. The sentiments with which Joséphine received his intervention may be imagined. The document he had delivered to her was shown to Napoleon, who, whether or not he had been privy to the action taken by his subordinate—the minister stated that he proceeded on his sole responsibility—affected indignation ; went so far as to offer to punish the delinquent with dismissal from his post, and—the placable Joséphine refusing the sacrifice—addressed to him a sharp rebuke for interference in a matter in no wise concerning him.² But however it might be explained away, the incident had not been of a nature to allay Joséphine's disquietude.

¹ *Mémoires de Fouché*, t. i. p. 380.

² *Mémoires de Madame de Rémusat*, t. iii. p. 294.



11. *Fouché, Duc d'Oranien.*

FOUCHÉ, DUC D'ORANIEN.

Such was the internal state of the Imperial household when the gay season at Fontainebleau came to an end and the Court returned to Paris. The house in the rue Cérutti being now vacated by Louis—engaged at the Hague in demonstrating by every means in his power that he had abjured his French nationality and that Holland and its interests had become his primary concern—Hortense took up her residence there, insensibly returning to a more normal and natural condition of mind, and resuming her old occupations. Napoleon Louis, the sight of whom had caused her nothing but pain in the first violence of her mourning for his brother, had by this time vindicated his right to a place in her heart, and she was passionately devoted to him. Once more, too, she began to assemble around her the society she had always loved, of artists, musicians, intimate acquaintances. To the rue Cérutti came, for informal evening gatherings, men like her old master Isabey, Gérard, and Garnerey. Drawings were improvised on the spur of the moment, taking sometimes the form of a picture of the room, sometimes the portrait-sketches in which the mistress of the house excelled. Women, too, were there, perhaps in fewer numbers than men, but whose affection for their hostess was no less real. “Though a Queen, she is a friend,” wrote the Duchesse d’Abrantès at a later date, “and she possesses friends. She has them still, now that a look, a word of hers, are no more than a pledge of affection.”

That day was not yet come, and it was both as

woman and as Queen that Hortense attracted to her house those she wished to see there. Musicians frequented it, and at this date Hortense's most popular compositions are said to have been written. In the morning it was her habit to compose her *romances*, setting to music by preference the words of the Comte de la Garde or M. Alexandre de Laborde, and in the evening to play them to her guests. She herself attached small importance to her performances, encouraging the select audience to which they were first submitted to indulge in criticism so candid that one of her well-known songs, "*Reposez-vous, bon Chevalier*," only escaped destruction by the interposition of Carbonnel, who declared it to be the best of her compositions. To this period belong songs, such as "*Partant pour la Syrie*," and others, soon to become familiar throughout France, the welcome bestowed upon them being doubtless due in part to the fact that they were the work of a Queen and a Bonaparte. It has been averred that this special claim to popularity was based upon a fraud ; that it was Hortense's habit to affix her name to the works of Carbonnel, Plantade and d'Alvimare, and that her share in the performance was limited to singing the songs. The grounds for the allegation are slight, and a letter from d'Alvimare's son, explicit in its denial of his father's share in the deception, may be permitted to throw discredit upon other assertions of a like nature. Writing in July, 1863, he says : " In this country all the world declared that my father was

the author of 'Partant pour la Syrie' ; I have often heard my father say to those who paid him that honour that the song belonged entirely to the Queen. The songs of that Princess have, it is true, a family likeness to those of my father ; but how can this cause astonishment when it is remembered that my father's compositions were much liked at that time, were often sung before Queen Hortense and by herself, and that, after all, he was her master in playing the harp, if not in composition ?" ¹

For the rest, there would seem to be nothing antecedently improbable in the hypothesis that the Queen's authorship was genuine. " All are very simple, if somewhat sentimental," says a musical expert ² of her songs ; " the form regular, harmony limited to the scale, rhythm uninteresting and monotonous. But they have a flowing melody, and are easy to sing." They are precisely, that is, of the kind that an amateur with a musical instinct, if no remarkable talent, might be expected to produce. " When a sweet or painful sentiment, a hope or a regret, rose in the Queen's heart, she placed herself at the piano, and sought to express, in a simple and naïve melody, the cares filling her soul. The air once found, it was communicated to the initiated with perfect liberty to approve or to blame ; and was then passed on to Carbonnel or to Plantade, that they might add its accompaniment." ³

Good or bad, the songs were the source of much

¹ Printed in the *Dictionnaire de Jul.*

² Mrs. Edmond Wodehouse.

³ *Critique et littérature musicales* (P. Saïdo), p. 298.

pleasure, not only to the composer, but to her kindly audience—an audience of a somewhat heterogeneous and motley nature, of whom “quelques personnes étaient bien, quelques autres beaucoup moins, et d’autres pas du tout.”¹ Artists, poets, musicians, mingled freely with men of leisure, soldiers, courtiers, all assuming perhaps a little of the last character in their intercourse with their hostess.

It was not adults alone who enjoyed the hospitality of the rue Cérutti. On other occasions Napoleon Louis acted host, entertaining his friends with dancing and lotteries in which no one was permitted to draw a blank. A lover of children, Hortense was the presiding spirit at these gatherings, dealing out the lots, changing the prizes that failed to give satisfaction, “and becoming the mother of each child in order to give it pleasure.”²

Thus, not unpeacefully, the winter passed, and with the spring came the birth of the Queen’s third son, Louis Napoleon, afterwards to become Napoleon III. It was on April 20, close upon three weeks before he was expected, that he saw the light, a weakly child, revived by baths of wine and envelopments of cotton-wool. His mother, as she herself records, had ceased to take into account her own chances of life, and demanded of her doctor whether she could survive the day.³ But mother and child lived, and the new-

¹ *Histoire des salons de Paris* (Duchesse d’Abrantès), t. iv. p. 395.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Memoirs of Hortense*, quoted in *Life of Napoleon III.* (Blanchard Jerrold), vol. i. p. 63.

born Prince received a cordial welcome. "I hear you have been happily delivered of a boy," wrote Napoleon to his stepdaughter. "I have felt the greatest joy at it. I only now require to be set at ease and to know that you are doing well ;" whilst Joséphine also wrote in glad congratulation.

The attitude of the absent father is more worthy of note. If Louis Bonaparte, under the skilful handling of his sister, had, in the autumn, conceived doubts as to the right of the child to bear his name, he had given proof that they had, for the time, been lulled to rest. He had caused prayers to be offered up in February in the churches of his dominions for his wife's safe deliverance. In a letter addressed to her in March, acknowledging tidings of her improvement in health, he explained that, owing to the condition of his own, it would be impossible for him to go to Paris in May, the date at which the birth was expected ; and when the event occurred it was announced on April 24, in his capital and by his orders, with salutes of cannon and trumpet-blasts. Nor were his congratulations to his wife wanting in courtesy. He hoped soon to hear of her entire recovery, and expressed a wish that the child should be privately *ondoyé*, pending a public christening in Holland. In all this, as well as in his communications on the subject with foreign Courts, there was no sign of that inclination to disown the Prince which he displayed, though intermittently, in the future.¹ How soon he began

¹ See *Napoléon et sa famille*, t. iv. p. 334.

to entertain fresh suspicions it is difficult to determine. His increasing urgency in seeking to obtain possession of Napoleon Louis, the elder child, though he would have been apparently content to leave her infant son with his mother, cannot be accepted as proof. As early as March, and six weeks before Hortense's confinement, he had made vigorous efforts to compass his object. "I wish greatly to have my son by the end of the month," he had written to his wife on the 3rd. "I have passed so disagreeable a winter that I hope you will consent to part with him for some months. . . . If you can send the little one at the end of the month," he reiterated, "it will be a great pleasure to me." To others he wrote confidently. "As soon as my son comes," he told Lavallette in May, "I feel that I shall be better." But the child was not sent. Even had Hortense not been devoid of compassion for the lonely King, it would have been too much to expect that a devoted mother should relinquish to the care of a melancholy invalid the child upon whom her heart was set; and it was becoming plain that without a struggle she would never consent to do so.

Her return to the Hague had been indefinitely postponed, and Louis was, by this time, probably no more anxious than she to resume a common existence. "We have never ceased," he wrote in the letter already quoted, "before as after this last epoch"—their brief reunion at Toulouse—"to demand, I, my absolute but legitimate freedom—that is to say, by the authority

of the Church—you, separation.” The demand was destined to be fruitless ; and, linked one to the other though apart, they carried on life as best they could. So long as Napoleon was inexorable, it must have been felt that Hortense’s return to Holland might at any time be forced upon her ; but she lingered on in France, determined to leave it only when compelled to do so ; Louis, sad, solitary, and sick, remaining alone amongst his new subjects, the alienation between himself and the Emperor, arising from their opposite views as to the duties and rights of a Dutch sovereign, imposing an additional weight upon his dejected spirits. Under the circumstances a letter addressed to him in August by Napoleon must have called a melancholy smile to his lips.

“ You should find happiness above all in your family,” wrote the Emperor dogmatically. “ I am sorry to see how small an amount of harmony reigns there. With a little consideration and care, and in the dismissal of the injurious suspicions which anger and outrage the most virtuous of women, you may be happy. A suspicious disposition and a little too much imperiousness in your household destroy your tranquillity. I hope, however, that, with your sense, you will become just, good, and tender towards your wife.”

It was a vain hope ; and had it been realised, the tardy amends might have come too late to produce any lasting reconciliation. In the meantime Napoleon Louis had become the object of a persistent

struggle on the part of his father, bent upon obtaining possession of him, Hortense being no less determined to use every means in her power to keep the child in her own hands. In the autumn of 1808, the representations he had made to his wife having produced no result, Louis addressed his brother on the subject at issue. "If I dared, Sire," he wrote, "I would proffer a request that I have long hesitated to make to you. It is that you would permit the Queen to send me her elder son. . . . If it is your Majesty's will that I should keep him with me until the moment that, in conformity with the constitutions of the kingdom, he returns to France—that is, until he is seven years old—your Majesty would cause me the greatest pleasure that it is possible to give me, and I should owe to you the only consolation I can have."

The demand, couched in terms it must have cost the father, conscious of his violated rights, no small effort to render conciliatory, was not unreasonable. No answer was returned, and Louis continued through the winter of 1808-9 to eat his heart out in Holland. In the spring of 1809, after the return of Napoleon from Spain, a step was taken calculated still further to lessen the chances of the child's surrender. Changes had taken place in the Imperial families, Murat becoming King of Naples, *vice* Joseph Bonaparte, upon whom his brother had conferred the crown of Spain; and the Grand Duchy of Berg and Cleves was vacant. In March the Emperor formally bestowed it upon Napoleon Louis, elder son of the King of Holland,

retaining in his hands—or rather in those of Hortense—guardianship and education.

If the measure was a blow struck at the claims of the father, as well as one directed at the independence of the kingdom to which the new Grand Duke was heir, Louis appears not to have detected its significance, and accepted the arrangement with satisfaction, “extremely pleased,” as he afterwards wrote, “with the gift, seeing in it one conferred by the Emperor upon Holland.” For once all were equally satisfied, and for the moment peace reigned.

CHAPTER XIV

1809

Change in the relations of Hortense and her husband—At Strasbourg and Baden—Madame de Krüdener—Joséphine's divorce determined upon—Its prelude—Final scenes—Hortense's part in them—Satisfaction of the Bonaparte family—Eugène's conduct—The divorce accomplished.

THE year 1809, destined before its close to realise all Joséphine's haunting fears, passed tranquilly for Hortense. Part of the winter, during the absence of the Emperor in Spain, was spent by her with her mother at the *Élysée* ; she was in France ; her children were with her ; it was all that for the moment was necessary to her happiness.

She had entered at this time upon a new phase of existence. A change, not less important because it had produced no external transformation in her surroundings, had taken place ; and the present conditions of her life must be constantly borne in mind if a just estimate is to be formed of her character and actions. In the absence of direct or positive proof, it is necessary to rely upon cumulative evidence ; but it is probable that in her own eyes she had ceased to owe to Louis Bonaparte the faith due from a wife, and that she was looking forward to the eventual dissolution of

their union. Louis' assertion makes it clear that from the autumn of 1807 the relations of the two as man and wife had had an end, and were never thereafter resumed. His desire, and the desire of the Queen, was for a separation ; and under these circumstances Hortense presumably considered herself virtually released from the obligations imposed upon her by her ill-starred marriage. Conventional morality or the world's opinion had at all times small influence over her ; whilst—at least at this period—it is probable that religion, as with many of her contemporaries, was rather a formal acquiescence in dogma than a motive power determining action and conduct. Nor, in judging her, must the prevalent moral atmosphere be overlooked. If there were those who deprecated Napoleon's divorce, it was for the most part not because the repudiation of his wife and the formation of a fresh connection involved a breach of the laws of God and man, but out of compassion for the discarded woman. When this was the view widely taken of the abrogation of the most sacred ties in deference to the demands of mere political expediency, it can scarcely cause surprise if Hortense, on no higher a level in such matters than her contemporaries, should have asserted her right to freedom from a bond which, unlike her mother's, was uncemented by any pretence of affection. She was, it is true, in no haste to vindicate her claim to liberty ; but when it appeared that the definite dissolution of her marriage was to be denied her by the Emperor's fiat, a woman

of her nature and opinions may not inconceivably have determined that the enfranchisement which would have been conferred by a legal sentence was, in the absence of that formality, morally hers. Man's law did not, for her, decide the limits of the right and wrong, and of higher codes she knew little.

Meantime her life was passed in a fashion calling for brief comment. She was continuing her amazing purchases of gems, was finding a source of constant interest in her children, was being painted by artists many and various, and was bearing her mother company, doubtless to the satisfaction of both. The agents charged by Louis with the duty of keeping watch upon his wife and reporting her proceedings to him can have found scanty material wherewith to feed his suspicions ; yet a deliberate intention of slighting her is perceptible in the instructions he issued to ignore the Queen in the arrangements to be made for removing furniture, statues, and pictures from Paris to Holland. In trivial details, as in matters of greater importance, Louis was advertising the fact of his domestic distrust, as well as his personal intention of denationalisation. Decazes—the Decazes who had been credited by Caroline Murat with occupying the position of Hortense's lover at Cauterets—was employed by the King to keep him informed of the position of affairs, public and private, in France ; and, detected by the Emperor as being the author of certain mischievous bulletins dispatched to the Hague, was summarily sent back to his master. "Since he is

the King's spy," wrote Napoleon contemptuously, "he may use him at home."

It was in the spring of this year that Hortense became acquainted with one of the most singular figures of the day, and became, although only to some extent and temporarily, the disciple of Madame de Krüdener.

The Emperor had quitted Paris in April, accompanied by Joséphine, whom he left at Strasbourg when he proceeded to open the year's campaign. She was presently joined by the Queen and her children, and from Strasbourg Hortense had passed on, at the invitation of her cousin, the Grand Duchess Stéphanie, to pay a visit to Baden, when she was promptly reminded, by a sharp rebuke addressed to her by Napoleon, that the sister-in-law of an Emperor is not a free agent.

"My daughter," he wrote from the seat of war, "I am greatly displeased that you have left France without my permission, and above all that you have removed my nephews from it. Since you are at the waters of Baden, remain there, but within one hour of your receiving this present letter, send my two nephews to Strasbourg to the Empress. It is the first time you have given me cause for displeasure, but you should not dispose of my nephews without my permission. You must be aware of the bad effect it produces. Since the waters of Baden are doing you good, you may remain there for some days. But, I repeat, lose not a moment in sending my nephews to Strasbourg. Your affectionate father, NAPOLEON."¹

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. i. pp. 292-3.

Enclosing this missive in a letter of her own, Joséphine dictated, in anxious terms, the answer to be returned to the Emperor's reprimand. Hortense was to reply that she had foreseen his wishes, and her children were at present with her mother ; that she had only had them a few days at Baden, in order to see them and to give them the benefit of change of air. It appears to have been the fact that the little Princes had been sent back to Strasbourg, and that Napoleon's orders, so far as they were concerned, had been forestalled. But Hortense herself was in no haste to curtail her stay at Baden, and though she paid a visit to her mother at the end of May, and was present at a ball given by the Strasbourg civic authorities, she returned to Baden without delay, the Emperor's letter notwithstanding. She acted under the influence of a new attraction—the presence in the watering-place of the remarkable woman whose power over those in high places was to render her a factor in European politics.

Madame de Krüdener had passed through not a few phases of existence ; and at the time that Hortense became acquainted with her, disenchanted by the infidelities of earthly passion, she had replaced it by the excitements and ecstasies of mystical devotion. A romantic attachment had apparently been formed between this lady (in her own eyes a teacher and apostle) and Mademoiselle Cochelet, the Queen's *lectrice* ; and by this means Madame de Krüdener was frequently brought into contact with Mademoiselle Cochelet's mistress.

The prophetess, whatever may be thought of her claims to inspiration, was in many respects well adapted to gain an ascendancy over such a woman as Hortense. Herself inclined to be a dreamer, the mystic and visionary element in Madame de Krüdener's character caused her to appeal to the Queen as a more practical moralist might have failed to do, exciting her imagination and quickening her emotions. The rhapsodies of the seer, read in cold blood, may strike the unsympathetic critic as the ravings of mere religious and fanatical egoism ; but the extraordinary position she attained, which was to render her a force to be reckoned with in affairs of State and the chosen guide and confidant of the Emperor Alexander, evidenced an astonishing personality. The power she wielded over many of those with whom she personally came into touch is a fact to be borne in mind whilst dealing with this portion of Hortense's history. Transitory as was her influence over the Queen, the two were brought together at a critical period, and in such a case an evanescent impression is capable of producing permanent results.

Educated in the creed of the Greek Church, Madame de Krüdener had undergone a variety of religious experiences, and was finally—though without discarding more authentic forms of belief—to constitute herself a species of “high-priestess of mystic love,” advancing a claim to prophetic powers and direct inspiration. Of the precise nature of her teaching and its effect upon the Queen it is only possible to hazard a conjecture. Madame de Krüdener's biographer has been

at pains to disprove the charge that she was hostile to the sanctity of the marriage tie ; but though he may be justified in asserting that her constant theme, the love which she depicted in glowing and hysterical terms, was purely humanitarian charity, it cannot be denied that her language laid her open to misconception. Letters such as that addressed to the wife of the unfortunate young General, Labédoyère, when six years later he was to expiate his loyalty to Napoleon on the scaffold, were susceptible of more than one interpretation. "The earthly woman," she wrote, "has nothing but tears. The woman who is truly a wife has eternity in which her ties become sublime. This is the marriage presented to us by the Church—all others are adultery. What is not founded on Christ is no more than one of those events of life upon which rest—as upon all the works of men of the flood and of vertigo—either passion, or cupidity, or that ambition named propriety, and, in short, all those follies men may desire to ennoble, but which belong to the domain of evil, and are struck by reprobation."

To this passage it would be difficult either to assign a meaning or to define the scope and limits of the denunciation. Who, it might be asked, is the woman of earth who is to have for her portion nothing but tears ? And what, to come to a practical question on a concrete matter, would be the view taken by the seer of the tie, contracted in deference to political expediency and family interest alone, binding Hortense to a man for whom she felt little else than dislike ?

Were the answer forthcoming, it is possible that it might be found to have some bearing upon the future of the wife in whom the preacher's interest was strong, and upon whom she was plainly anxious to establish and maintain a hold. Hortense was not likely to surrender her conscience or judgment blindly into the keeping of another ; but the weight of an attractive and interesting personality, thrown into the scales at a moment when principles of conduct and of right and wrong were awaiting determination, may not have been without its effect. Nor did the Queen's departure from Baden altogether sever the connection ; and a letter addressed to Mademoiselle Cochelet in the following December affords a key to the methods employed by the *illuminée*, half oracle, half flatterer, to retain her influence over one whom she possibly regarded in the light of a neophyte.

"How often," she wrote to the *lectrice*, "have I thought of Baden and of those pleasant days, those landscapes, those majestic mountains, those ruins alive with memories ! In that imposing frame how often have I again looked upon the picture of an ideal woman, of a Queen whom I know how to love and to respect with the enthusiasm she deserves ! Through how many griefs has she passed ! But dawn would not be so fair if it did not come thus radiantly forth from the shadows, and her virtue is like the sea, which owes its most lovely effects to storm. . . . Transporting myself in thought to the vicinity of the Queen whom you have the happiness to be near, I recall her touching

kindness, and I question, ‘ Could I ask for her thrones from Heaven, would she be happy ? ’ No ; she needs far more. High suffering, daughter of Heaven, has tested that angelic soul ; she has almost succumbed under such bitter affliction. I have seen her in fancy separated from her children, and I know her. I have felt so many things ! But also I have seen the vast domains of indestructible happiness opening before her. . . . Deign to tell her all this, and deign to paint me to her, with that heart that has already felt so much, suffered so much, and is not exhausted ; which, after all the goods life could give and all its languors, has been again steeped in that religion, comforting and living, that I desire for her.”

Continuing a letter designed, it is clear, to carry on and strengthen the impression made at Baden, the writer explains that a sacred duty has been as yet unperformed. “ Some little time before the death of the Queen of Prussia, I received a letter from her. I had spoken to her with enthusiasm of the Queen of Holland ; I told her that in her she had one capable of appreciating her. Here is what she said : ‘ What you tell me of the Queen of Holland has interested me extremely. All who know her love her and do her justice ; the affection she is good enough to entertain for me has surprised me agreeably ; and I should like her to know the value I place upon being thus distinguished.’ ”

The young Empress of Russia had also enjoyed the advantage of personal intercourse with this counsellor

of crowned heads, and to her Madame de Krüdener reported that she had likewise "painted the Queen, like one of those beautiful pictures of Raphael's appealing to the eye."

When Madame de Krüdener's letter was written, fresh trouble had been the lot of the Queen. "What is the Empress Joséphine doing?" Madame de Krüdener had inquired. "I have for her that inspiration, that devotion, which electrifies. I have need that she should be happy." Madame de Krüdener's need was not to be satisfied. The darkest hour of Joséphine's life was at hand.

The autumn had been spent by Hortense at Plombières, where she had remained four months. By the time she was once more at Paris, her personal troubles and anxieties were thrown into the background by the calamity menacing her mother. The catastrophe so long anticipated and dreaded was imminent; the divorce was a thing settled and determined. When the Emperor returned from the campaign of 1809, he had added another victory to those to be publicly celebrated by Te Deums in Notre Dame; he had triumphed over affection, true and genuine as far as it went, over sentiment, long habit, and compassion, and had decided to repudiate his wife. There can be no doubt that he acted with reluctance, that it cost him a painful struggle to take the step he had been meditating so long, and to resolve upon the sacrifice of Joséphine to what he considered the exigencies of the State. But the fight was over, the unhappy woman's fate was

sealed, and the sword she had long known to be suspended over her head was about to descend.

Since his determination had been taken, the Emperor was impatient to put an end to the strain and tension attending the preliminary stage of its execution. On his arrival at Fontainebleau, some four-and-twenty hours before he had been expected, the absence of a welcome roused him to unreasonable displeasure. When, hurrying from Saint-Cloud where the news had found her, Joséphine reached the palace, he would scarcely consent to look up from the letter he was writing, to bestow a curt and ungracious greeting upon her, nor was it until she had been reduced to tears that he could be brought to pardon her most involuntary offence. Yet he had already made up his mind to discard the woman whose purely imaginary lack of devotion he treated with this severity. The inconsistency was not wholly unnatural, and, unhappy and irritable, he may have been visiting his own pain upon her. After his fashion he loved her, nor did he escape unscathed. “Ce grand palais m’a paru vide, et je me suis trouvé isolé,”¹ he wrote from the Tuileries when his purpose had been accomplished and Joséphine’s place was vacant. But above all he probably shrank from inflicting the inevitable suffering. He was not callous as to the sorrow he caused. “This man,” wrote his secretary, Ménéval, “regarded by so many as without pity, dreaded the sight of tears, and of that affliction which exercised an almost irresistible power

¹ *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, t. ii, p. 106.

over him.”¹ So much indeed was this the case that to witness far less serious grief on Joséphine’s part, such as that caused by jealousy, would take effect so strongly upon his nerves that he would remain for hours upon his couch, a prey to silent emotion and incapable of attending to business.²

To a man thus constituted, the necessity of inflicting a wound, incurable in its very nature, upon the woman who had been his companion for thirteen years must have been full of pain, and though he never swerved from his intention, the period passed by the Court at Fontainebleau, lasting till the middle of November, was a melancholy one. Few belonging to the Imperial household can have been ignorant of what was in contemplation; and the approaching event cast its shadow over the relations of the two whose union was soon to be dissolved. Their intercourse was marked by constraint and embarrassment; unaccustomed formality prevailed in the domestic arrangements of the palace; and the Emperor remained visibly pre-occupied and anxious.³ Napoleon would willingly have devolved the duty of preparing her mother for the blow awaiting her on Hortense, and he spoke to her in terms admitting of no misconception. France, he said, placed no confidence in his brothers; Eugène did not bear his name; and should he leave behind him no direct heir, anarchy would be the conse-

¹ *Mémoires de Ménéval*, t. ii, p. 285.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Mémoires de Constant*, t. iv, p. 213.

quence. If he had not hitherto resorted to the expedient of a divorce, his attachment to her mother had been the cause.¹

Hortense listened and understood, understanding also that in her mother's fall was involved an entire Beauharnais defeat ; that the foes ranged for thirteen years against her family, and including in their ranks every one of the Bonaparte connection, were at length to win their long-deferred triumph. But she was not disposed to play the part assigned to her by the Emperor ; and, keeping her own counsel, proud and silent, possessed sufficient self-restraint to abstain from precipitating the destruction of her mother's last hopes by communicating to her the language used by Napoleon. It was not long before Joséphine learnt all that she could have told her. On November 14 the Court had returned to Paris, and by the end of the month the blow had descended.

It was on November 30 that the fatal announcement was made. Constant, an eye-witness of what he describes, has left a picture of the scene preceding it : of the dinner eaten in silence, of the headdress worn by the Empress in the hope of concealing her pallor and the traces of the tears she had been shedding all day. Wrapped in melancholy musing, the Emperor scarcely raised his eyes, save to cast a furtive glance at his wife. Neither attempted to eat, and the dishes, one after the other, were presented and removed untouched, the officials on duty watching, with veiled

¹ *Napoléon et sa famille*, t. iv. p. 496.

curiosity and interest, the approach of the long-expected crisis.

The dreary meal was at length brought to an end. Her handkerchief pressed to her lips, Joséphine followed the Emperor from the dining-room. Coffee was drunk in the same heavy silence, Napoleon's eyes fixed upon his wife's face, as she awaited, like a criminal, the moment when sentence should be pronounced. And still the decisive words were deferred, till even the victim must, one would imagine, have desired that the strained tensivity of expectation should be converted into certainty. At length, at a sign from their master, those present withdrew, leaving the two alone, Constant and one other attendant, M. de Bausset, a Prefect of the Palace, remaining on duty in the adjoining chamber. Minutes passed. Then suddenly the stillness was broken by a cry. The door was abruptly opened by Napoleon, disclosing the Empress upon the ground, sobbing.

"You will not do it," the listeners heard her cry; "you will not kill me." Then, bidding de Bausset enter, the Emperor helped him to lift the unhappy woman from the floor and to carry her to her apartments, where, his eyes full of tears, he left her to the care of her women.¹ Hortense and Corvisart, the physician, had been summoned. Awaiting their arrival, Napoleon, in broken, incoherent sentences, poured out his trouble and regret to de Bausset, the only listener at hand, who, astonished at being thus made his master's

¹ *Mémoires de Constant*, t. iv. pp. 213-6.

confidant, observed naïvely that he must have been “réellement hors de lui.”

“The interests of France and of my dynasty,” he said, with panting breath and pauses between the words, “have done violence to my heart. . . . Divorce has become for me a rigorous duty. . . . I am the more grieved,” he added, “at the scene Joséphine has made, because she must have known three days ago from Hortense the unhappy obligation condemning me to part from her. . . . I pity her with all my soul. . . .”¹

Upon the arrival of his stepdaughter, with Cambacérès, Fouché, and Corvisart, Napoleon accompanied her to the door of her mother’s room, leaving her to enter it alone.

“Allons, ma fille,” he bade her, “du courage.”

“Oh ! sire, j’en ai,” she replied, but her voice was broken by weeping.²

Now that the crisis had been reached, he did his best to reconcile the daughter of the woman he was wronging to the step he had taken, to bring her to acknowledge that he had acted under compulsion and had had no alternative, and to convince her that his love and care for his wife’s children would suffer no diminution.

At such a moment his asseverations must have fallen coldly upon Hortense’s ears. She and Eugène, she replied—answering for both—would withdraw from Court, adding, in reply to her stepfather’s protests, that

¹ *Mémoires de Bausset*, t. i. pp. 371-4.

² *Mémoires de Ménéval*, t. ii. 251.

she would not forget what she owed him. Not satisfied with this assurance, he continued his reproaches.

“You will forsake me?” he asked—“you, my children, to whom I have been a father? No, no, you will not do it. You will remain with me. Your children’s destiny demands that you should make the effort.” It was perhaps no wonder that he prevailed. Thirteen years of constant kindness and affection pleaded on his side, and the clinging to old ties, the craving for love displayed by the conqueror of Europe may have moved and touched his stepdaughter. In spite of her indignant pain she did not persist in the intention she had declared.

The Imperial family, summoned by Napoleon, were not long in assembling in Paris. Joseph Bonaparte was detained elsewhere, but Caroline Murat, always eager to take a prominent part in what was going forward, was in Paris by December 3, her husband still sooner. Eugène was to arrive on the 7th, being met by his sister at Nemours. Louis Bonaparte, with some decent show of regret for the event calling him thither, reached the capital on the day following that upon which his mother-in-law had learnt her doom. He took up his residence with his mother and showed a marked avoidance of the rue Cérutti, where his wife would have been found. In any case he would have preferred to hold himself apart from her, but at the present juncture in especial the atmosphere surrounding *Madame Mère* must have been more congenial to a Bonaparte than the society of Joséphine’s

daughter. A letter written by the old and vindictive woman to her son Lucien, still estranged from Napoleon, was representative of the sentiments of the family and of the hopes they built upon the Empress's fall.

"The Emperor," she wrote, "is about to divorce the Empress. The thing is determined upon, and will soon be made public. Nothing is now in question except the forms to be observed. Louis also is separating from his wife, but without a divorce. He is lodging at my house. His health is better than usual. I believe myself able to assure you that the Emperor's sentiments towards his family are already quite different from what they have been heretofore. Be not obstinate, my dear son. Begin by doing what is asked of you, and I hope that before long we shall all be content."

Thus wrote Joséphine's inveterate enemy, in the hour of her triumph, forgetful of all save the hatred she bore the Beauharnais. Joséphine, it was true, had pleaded the cause of the very man to whom the letter was addressed, and had endeavoured to soften his brother towards him. To Jérôme, too, she had been in earlier days "*sa chère petite sœur*," and had shown cordial affection and kindness to his wife. Yet all her sweetness, gentleness, and grace failed to win one genuine feeling of compassion or sympathy from the Bonaparte clan ranged, men and women, against her. In her mother-in-law's eyes, the Beauharnais influence removed, even Lucien might look for rehabilitation. All would go well.



MARIE PAULINE, PRINCESS BORGHESI.

Painted by GIOVANNI CARLO DESSA, 1795. Naples. Italy.

All was already going well in the eyes of Madame Letitia. In the palace she did the honours for her son, Joséphine rarely appearing in the Court circle. It was an earnest of what was quickly to follow. For the present, however, on great occasions the discarded wife filled her old place. At the Te Deum in celebration of the victories of the past campaign she occupied for the last time, save for a *fête* at the Hôtel de Ville, her seat as Empress at Napoleon's side. A brilliant company had assembled to do honour to the victor. His brothers, the Kings of Holland and Westphalia, were present, with Caroline Murat and her husband. Pauline Borghese, never gayer, was there, in a dress contrasting in its magnificence with Hortense's more simple garb. The Kings of Saxony and Würtemberg took part in the proceedings. And *Madame Mère*, revengeful and relentless as a Corsican has a right to be, joined in the great thanksgiving, doubtless adding to it a special and private one in recognition of the ruin overtaking her enemy.

For the Beauharnais every scene in which they shared must have been a fresh ordeal. The position of his mother was a bitter humiliation to Eugène. Yet, as always, he played his difficult part well and loyally, with the dignity belonging to a great simplicity and an absolute uprightness. Was it the fact, he had demanded of the Emperor on his arrival, that the divorce was a thing settled and determined? Then, as Napoleon, making a sign of assent, held out his hand, "Sire," he said, "permit me to leave you. . . . The son of her

who is no longer Empress cannot continue to be Viceroy."

Proceeding, as Hortense had done, to announce further his intention of following his mother to her retreat, he, like his sister, found the Emperor bent upon combating his resolution. Profoundly aggrieved at the attitude assumed by his stepson, Napoleon vouchsafed to plead his cause, strongly and urgently, with perhaps the one man connected with him by family ties upon whose disinterested affection he felt himself able to count. Would Eugène, he asked, indeed leave him? Did he not know how imperious had been the reasons dictating his present action? Were the Viceroy to carry out his intention, who—supposing him to obtain that heir who was the object of his dearest wishes—who, Eugène gone, would replace him near the child when he was absent? Who would serve it as father, should he die? Who would bring it up, make a man of it?¹ The line of argument was well calculated to appeal to the Prince, loyal, generous, and devoted, both as soldier and as son, to his Emperor. Like his sister, he was unable to resist the entreaties of the ruler whose lightest word was accustomed to be accepted as a command, and he yielded to his stepfather's will. A last explanation took place, in his presence, between the two who were no longer to be husband and wife. Before Joséphine's son, as judge, Napoleon set forth his reasons, his motives, his necessities; whilst Joséphine, in tears, but

¹ *Mémoires de Constant*, t. iv. p. 221.

making no further resistance, listened. One request she proffered. Let the future of Eugène at least be assured by his nomination to be King of Italy.

Whether or not Napoleon might have granted her desire, Eugène, true to his character, declined to have the question mooted. Should the son, he asked, accept a crown as the price of his mother's separation? If she were to submit to the Emperor's will, it was for her alone that thought must now be taken. Napoleon was not unmoved by a fresh proof of the generosity contrasting so sharply with the rapacious ambition of his kin. "I recognise Eugène's heart," he said. "He is right in trusting to my tenderness."

With the spectacle of his mother's repudiation before him it was not a moment to encourage confidence in the affection of monarchs; but Eugène had better comfort than could be extracted from the vague assurances of his stepfather's care and interest. From the time when the first news of the disaster had reached her, his wife had been steady in her adherence to the Beauharnais cause and had done what she could to soften the blow to her husband. It was not the adopted son of the Emperor that she had married, it had been Eugène de Beauharnais—so she told him in reply to his regrets, possibly embittered by the consciousness that his royal bride had been won, involuntarily, on false pretences.¹ "They cannot do to you what they would like," she wrote proudly in this hour of his mortification, "since they are unable to take from you a spotless reputation,

¹ *Mémoires de Constant.*

and a conscience free from all reproach.”¹ Whatever might befall, and however much uncertainty might hang over his future, Eugène, possessing his wife’s love, was not left empty-handed.

By the middle of December, and surely to the relief of all concerned, the necessary formalities had been concluded. A *Senatus-Consulte* had pronounced the dissolution of the civil marriage; the representatives of Parisian ecclesiastic officialism were to declare the religious union annulled.² In the salon of the Tuileries the final scene took place. Leaning upon the arm of Hortense, who was observed to be as colourless and far more visibly moved than her mother, the Empress, dressed in plain white and without an ornament, entered the room where the Imperial family were assembled. With folded arms, Eugène de Beauharnais stood beside the Emperor whilst the deed of separation was read aloud by the Comte de Saint-Jean d’Angely. The silence was profound. Seated in the middle of the room as the central figure in the tragedy, the Empress leant her elbow on a table near. Hortense, standing behind, was sobbing. The recitation of the deed over, Joséphine rose, pronounced the necessary formula and signed her own sentence. Then, still supported by her daughter, she left the room. Eugène

¹ *Napoléon et sa famille* (Masson), t. iv. p. 508.

² All the Cardinals but two—Napoleon’s uncle, Fesch, and one other—absented themselves from the religious celebration of the Emperor’s second marriage, on the grounds that the Pope had not intervened to annul the first. They were consequently banished from Paris, and prohibited by the Emperor from wearing their distinctive garb.—*Mémoires de Ménéval*, t. ii. pp. 336-7.

was following ; but the strain had been too great, and between the inner and outer doors he fainted.¹

The ceremony had taken place in the evening. On the following day it had been arranged that the Emperor should go to Trianon and Joséphine to Malmaison. But that last night was not to pass without a meeting. Constant, who as first *valet de chambre* was in attendance, relates how, when he was waiting to receive his master's last orders, Joséphine entered the room, and, advancing uncertainly to the Emperor's bedside, broke into bitter weeping, whilst Napoleon, in tears, sought to soothe her, entreating her—his favourite admonition—to be “plus raisonnable.” “Allons, du courage,” he bade her ; “je serai toujours ton ami.” Only after some minutes had passed did he become conscious of the presence of a witness and desired his valet to leave the room. When, watching in the antechamber, Constant had seen Joséphine pass out, still weeping, he entered to put out the lights in his master's room. He found Napoleon was lying with his face hidden, and as silent as death.² So ended that eventful day.

On the morrow the departure was to take place. Joséphine's waiting-woman supplies the account of the morning hours she spent in the Empress's apartment, packing her possessions ; of Eugène and Hortense, never absent from their mother's side ; of the Viceroy's efforts to keep up a show of gaiety and to distract her

¹ *Mémoires de Constant*, t. iv. pp. 221-2.

² *Ibid.*, t. iv. p. 224.

attention from the bitterness of the moment, his own melancholy apparent through all his attempts to disguise it ; of Hortense's care and tenderness.¹ One last farewell remained to be taken. The hour was come for Napoleon to leave the Tuileries, and attended by his secretary, Ménèval, he sought his wife's apartment, finding her, doubtless in expectation of his coming, alone. Springing up, she flung herself into his arms ; then, as she clung to him, sobbing, a merciful unconsciousness came to her aid, and she swooned. When she recovered her senses, he was gone.²

¹ *Mémoires de Mademoiselle d'Avrillon*, t. ii. pp. 146-7.

² *Mémoires de Ménèval*, t. ii. p. 293.

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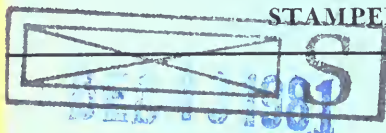
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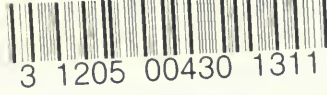
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